

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
MACKEREL COBIA COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Atlantic Beach, NC
December 7, 2017

The Committee approved minutes from the September 2017 meeting. The Committee approved the agenda.

Status of Commercial Catches v. ACLs

The Committee received an update on commercial and recreational landings for Atlantic king mackerel, Atlantic Spanish mackerel and Atlantic and Florida east coast cobia from SERO staff.

Update on the ASMFC Interstate Plan for Cobia

Bob Beal, Executive Director of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, briefed the Committee on the status of the interstate management plan. In November 2018, ASMFC approved management measures for Atlantic cobia in state waters. Recreational and commercial possession and size limits follow those set up in CMP Framework Amendment 4. State-by-state recreational harvest allocations are based on the federal ACL of 620,000 pounds. These allocations are soft harvest targets, with landings monitored every three years. Recreational harvest will be reduced by 1% for de minimis states.

State implementation plans will be reviewed in January 2018, and the new plan will be implemented April 2018.

Request for recalculation of 2015 and 2016 recreational landings for Atlantic cobia

The Committee received an update on their request that MRIP provide a timeline for recalculated Atlantic cobia recreational harvest for 2015 and 2016 using alternative annual estimates of catch and effort. Dr. David Van Voorhees reiterated that any alternative estimation method would need to be rigorously evaluated before it could be used to produce alternative estimates for Atlantic cobia harvest. Dr. Van Voorhees also indicated that NMFS had initiated joint planning within the agency for a 2018 project that will look at alternative estimation methods, including those for cobia. They plan to engage the Council and SSCs in the process. There is not a set timeline currently, but their intent is to complete the project as soon as possible given available resources.

CMP Amendment 31 (Atlantic Cobia Management)

Council staff reviewed a decision document for Coastal Migratory Amendment 31, which contains one action with a range of alternatives for a complementary plan with ASMFC as well as removal of Atlantic cobia from the management unit. The following motions were approved:

**MOTION # 1: ACCEPT THE PURPOSE AND NEED AS MODIFIED
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

The purpose is to reduce complexity of management and facilitate improved coordination of state and federal management of Atlantic cobia.

The need is to provide for effective management and fair and equitable access to Atlantic Cobia harvest opportunities without reducing protection to the stock.

**MOTION # 2: ACCEPT THE IPT’S RECOMMENDATION TO MOVE ALTERNATIVE 5 TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX.
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

The Committee directed staff to accept the IPT’s recommended wording changes for Alternatives 1 through 4 and include bullet points explaining the intent of Alternatives 3 and 4:

Alternative 1 (No Action). Continue the current management of Atlantic cobia via the Fishery Management Plan for Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources of the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic regions (CMP FMP).

Alternative 2. Remove Atlantic cobia from the CMP FMP.

Alternative 3. Establish a policy in the CMP FMP for complimentary management of Atlantic cobia with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).

Alternative 4. Establish a framework procedure in the CMP FMP for an enhanced cooperative management system with the ASMFC that allows changes to Atlantic cobia management through NMFS rulemaking.

**MOTION # 3: SELECT ALTERNATIVE TWO AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL (1 OPPOSED)**

**MOTION # 4: APPROVE COASTAL MIGRATORY PELAGICS AMENDMENT 31 FOR
PUBLIC HEARINGS
APPROVED BY COUNCIL (1 OPPOSED)**

The Committee directed Council staff to seek input during public hearings on when Final Action on CMP Amendment 31 should be taken relative to the Cobia Stock ID Workshop and subsequent Benchmark Assessment.

CMP Framework Amendment 6 (Atlantic King Mackerel Trip Limits)

The new regulations for king mackerel established in CMP Amendment 26 became effective on May 11, 2017, including updated commercial trip limits for the Atlantic Southern zone. Stakeholders and the AP/Sub-Panel have recommended that the Council consider revising the trip limits to allow for a higher trip limit north of the Volusia/Brevard county line, which would mirror trip limits prior to Amendment 26. In September 2017, Council staff reviewed a document with options for alternatives to be included in a framework amendment addressing Atlantic king mackerel commercial trip limits. Council staff presented an updated options paper and the following motions were approved:

**MOTION # 5: APPROVE SUGGESTED LANGUAGE FOR PURPOSE AND NEED.
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

The purpose is to modify the commercial trip limit for Atlantic king mackerel in the Atlantic Southern Zone.

The need is to provide anglers with a trip limit sufficient to support fishing activity while constraining harvest to the ACL and providing for year-round access.

**MOTION # 6: ACCEPT THE RECOMMENDED WORDING FOR ALTERNATIVES 1
THROUGH 4.
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

Alternative 1 (No Action): The commercial trip limits for Atlantic king mackerel:

- Season 1
 - March 1 – March 31
 - North of the Flagler/Volusia line: 3,500 lbs
 - South of the Flagler/Volusia line: 50 fish
 - April 1 – September 30
 - North of the Flagler/Volusia line: 3,500 lbs
 - South of the Flagler/Volusia line: 75 fish until 75% of the Season 1 quota is met, and then the trip limit is 50 fish until Sept 30
- Season 2
 - October 1 – End of February
 - North of the Flagler/Volusia line: 3,500 lbs
 - South of the Flagler/Volusia line: 50 fish
 - Starting February 1 through the end of February, if less than 70% of the Season 2 quota has been met, the trip limit increases to 75 fish.

Alternative 2: Adjust the commercial trip limits for Atlantic king mackerel in the Atlantic Southern Zone for Season 1:

- Season 1
 - March 1- March 31
 - North of Flagler/Volusia line: 3,500 lbs
 - South of Flagler/Volusia line: 50 fish
 - April 1 – September 30
 - North of Volusia/Brevard line: 3,500 lbs
 - South of Volusia/Brevard line: 75 fish until 75% of the Season 1 quota is met, and then the trip limit is 50 fish until Sept 30

Alternative 3: Adjust the commercial trip limits for Atlantic king mackerel in the Atlantic Southern Zone for Season 1:

- Season 1
 - March 1- March 31
 - North of Flagler/Volusia line: 3,500 lbs
 - South of Flagler/Volusia line: 75 fish
 - April 1 – September 30
 - North of Volusia/Brevard line: 3,500 lbs
 - South of Volusia/Brevard line: 75 fish until 75% of the Season 1 quota is met, and then the trip limit is 50 fish until Sept 30

Alternative 4: Adjust the commercial trip limits for Atlantic king mackerel in the Atlantic Southern Zone for Season 1:

- Season 1 (Mar – Sept)
 - North of Volusia/Brevard line: 3,500 lbs
 - South of Volusia/Brevard line:
 - March 1- March 30: 50 fish
 - April 1 – September 30: 75 fish until 75% of the Season 1 quota is met, and then the trip limit is 50 fish until September 30

**MOTION # 7: APPROVE COASTAL MIGRATORY PELAGICS FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT 6 FOR SCOPING AT MARCH 2018 MEETING.
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

Other Business

The Committee discussed Atlantic king mackerel tournament sales, which are currently counted against the commercial ACL. States were requested to bring information on Atlantic king mackerel tournament sales over the last three years to the March 2018 meeting for discussion.

Commercial landings for Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel, in addition to commercial and recreational landings of Atlantic cobia are tracked “as reported.” At the June 2017 meeting, SEFSC provided information that the landings can be tracked with the Council-preferred units. The Committee specified that the preference is for Spanish mackerel to be tracked in whole weight, and king mackerel should be tracked in gutted weight. Conversation between Gulf Council staff and South Atlantic staff indicate the Gulf Council may prefer king mackerel to be tracked in whole weight.

Note: Council staff drafts the timing and task motion based on Committee action. If points require clarification, they will be added to the draft motion. The Committee should review this wording carefully to be sure it accurately reflects their intent prior to making the motion.

Timing and Task(s)

MOTION # 8: ADOPT THE FOLLOWING TIMING AND TASKS:

- Prepare Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 31 for web-based public hearings and for the March Council meeting.

- Hold public hearing webinars for Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 31.
- Prepare Coastal Migratory Pelagics Framework Amendment 6 for scoping at the March 2018 Council meeting.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL