

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

MACKEREL COBIA COMMITTEE

**Radisson Resort at the Port
Cape Canaveral, Florida
June 10, 2025**

Transcript

Mackerel Cobia Committee

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Dr. Clay Porch

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Observers and Participants

Other observers and participants attached.

The Mackerel Cobia Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Radisson Resort at the Port, Cape Canaveral, Florida, on Tuesday, June 10, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman Tom Roller.

MR. ROLLER: I'm going to begin the Mackerel Cobia Committee. First, I'm going to introduce myself. My name is Tom Roller, and I'm a council member from North Carolina. In my everyday life, I'm a for-hire operator, and, as always, I would like to remind the council that our king and Spanish mackerel fisheries are of the most important finfish species the council manages in ex-vessel value and recreational trips.

The first order of business we have is an approval of the agenda. I'm looking to see if there is anyone who disagrees with the agenda or would like to make any changes? Seeing no opposition to that, I will say the agenda is approved by consensus. The next order of business we have is approval of the minutes from the March 2025 meeting. Does anyone have any objection to the minutes as presented? Seeing no objection, I will go ahead and approve the minutes by consensus.

The first order of business is we have our Mackerel Cobia Advisory report, and I'm going to take this moment to introduce you guys to our new Mackerel AP chair, who is known to most of us. His name is Thomas Newman, and, Thomas, if you want to go into that, and also just introduce yourself a little bit, tell a little bit about yourself.

MR. NEWMAN: My name is Thomas Newman. I'm a commercial fisherman from North Carolina. I've been on the AP for four or five years. I also work part-time with North Carolina Fisheries Association.

MR. ROLLER: With that, go ahead, buddy.

MR. NEWMAN: The first thing we discussed at the Macro AP meeting was the mackerel port meetings. We actually haven't had an AP meeting in a little over a year, and we took that year off to do the mackerel port meetings, which I think was a very important thing to do right now, before we go into looking at doing our amendment for Spanish mackerel, but the port meetings were very well-received.

We went to a lot of communities we don't normally go to, and we got to reach out to a lot of people that we normally don't see, and don't hear from on a regular basis, and I also think we picked up several AP members, and I think they were kind of excited to get more people involved in the process, and so I think these were very good, and I hope we can continue to do those in the future.

We did have a small update on SEDAR 78, which, like I said, it's been a year since we've been in there, but we discussed what was happening, but the biggest thing was a motion that the AP made. We made a motion to recommend that the council request an update of the Atlantic Spanish mackerel OFL and ABC recommendations, based on the results of the FES pilot study, before implementing any new catch levels.

There was concern that, if we try to get this process going too quickly, and then if the FES were to pull back recreational landings by 20, 30, 40 percent, then anything that had been reallocated may have to be looked at again in the near future, and so it was the AP's recommendation to kind of see what happens when we get a report back from MRIP in this coming December.

A lot of the feedback from the port meetings was similar to what our AP talked about as well, stuff that we've been talking about for years, like don't look at the sector allocations until recreational estimates have been improved, like our motion. We did talk about modifying the commercial Spanish fishing year a little bit, looking at step-downs. We did talk about considering a vessel limit, but I think that would be more appropriate once we find out what the actual recreational numbers are going to be, after the pilot study.

We also looked at regional zones, possibly, for the recreational sector, because there was concern that, if the recreational sector numbers continued to be high, with our fishing year starting in March, the fishery would possibly close midway through the fishing year, and that's when the fish are in Florida, and then our Florida fishermen may not have access to Spanish mackerel.

The giant manta ray interactions, we had a brief presentation. The council also received this presentation, and it was requested that the AP look at it as well. We really only had one AP member that gave a lot of information on this issue. He said it was more of a state issue. It happened for just a few weeks out of the year, and he thought that it was more appropriate that the states take on this issue, versus a federal issue, being it was an inside issue, mainly happening in the State of Florida. North Carolina fishermen -- I believe they said, and Georgia and South Carolina said, they rarely ever see giant manta rays.

We had a citizen science presentation. We talked about the FISHstory project, the SAFMC Release, and the SMILE Project. We're still working on these issues, and I guess one thing I do remember was we talked about, you know, with some of these pictures we're taking on some of the recreational reporting apps, and if the council maybe would give out a little whistle, or some object of known measure, they could take a picture of the fish with that object, and then maybe we could extrapolate that data, to see how big that fish is, so we could start using more in our stock assessments.

The Lines of Communication, we were the first AP to go through this, and this was -- I'll admit it was a little bit hectic, but there was a lot of good ideas that came out of it. I think staff had some really good feedback, and hopefully this can be more of our engagement, to get more community members engaged, that we don't normally see, and just something to get people talking, who don't normally talk, because that's the thing, is that we need to hear about people who, you know, are not at the meetings every day, and who can't make it to these meetings out of state, but I think there's some really good conversations that came out of this, and I think it will be a really good step to increase participation from people who we don't always hear from.

MS. WIEGAND: I didn't know if you wanted to go into --

MR. NEWMAN: I mean, if you have something you want to talk about, but, yes, that was hectic for me. Under Other Business, we did have a motion to request the council to ask the AP to have a discussion about adding Atlantic bonito to the CMP FMP. We had a small discussion there, but we had a vote. Eight were in favor, one opposed, and two abstentions to look at adding Atlantic bonito to the CMP FMP.

MR. ROLLER: Do we have any questions for Thomas? Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Not a question, but, if you go back to the slide on manta rays, so it talks about, I guess, this being more of a state issue than a federal issue, and so just to acknowledge that, because manta rays are listed as an endangered species, threatened under the Endangered Species Act, that's why the conversation is happening both for state and federal, because of ESA jurisdiction.

MR. ROLLER: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Just a thought on the FISHstory. I was wondering, as you were saying that, you know, giving folks some type of scale, or measure, I was wondering if going to the marinas that have the boards, where you put the fish up, if we can't -- Whether it's a sticker that you put on one of the posts or something that gives us a scale to immediately work from, and it might be an easy way to make sure it gets into all the photos for -- When we look back ten years from now, you might have a scale right there where all the photos were collected.

MS. WIEGAND: Yes, and I think that's certainly something that we could do, and I'll sort of look to Julia Byrd, our Citizen Science Program Manager, if I misspeak, but I think, for FISHstory, when they're up on those leader boards, because they're wood, and they're usually two-by-fours, there's a known size of the wood they're being put up on, and that's what has been used thus far to sort of measure the king mackerel lengths.

MR. ROLLER: Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I just wanted to point out that FWC met with an NGO, and I believe it was last week, we think their name is the Giant Manta Ray Trust, but they have a ton of educational materials, and other things, and we are working with them on outreach and education on this specific topic in Florida, and so we're partnering with them on this.

MR. ROLLER: Do we have any other questions? Seeing none, I think we can conclude the AP report. Thank you for that, Thomas. Our next order of business is we're going to have a report on the Gulf Council Coastal Migratory Pelagics Stakeholder Engagement Effort, and we have Emily Muehlstein, from the Gulf Council, to present that online, and so whenever you're ready, Emily.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: Okay. I'm ready. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Gulf Council hosted its Coastal Migratory Pelagic Special Engagement Effort as a complementary effort to what you, the South Atlantic folks, were doing with your mackerel port meetings. That sounds like it was a wildly successful effort on your coast, and I'm really excited to hear that you've got so many people engaged, and so many people that weren't typically engaged in your process.

Our council did take a little bit of a different approach than the South Atlantic, because we've had, historically, really low attendance at our in-person coastal migratory pelagic engagement opportunities. We also added cobia to our effort, because we have had a number of recent management changes in cobia, and we have overlapping fishermen, and APs, that sort of made it make sense for us to include cobia along with our king and Spanish Mackerel information gathering.

We did gather feedback from coastal migratory pelagic fishermen using three separate methods. First, we held special sessions with our Coastal Migratory Pelagic and Reef Fish Advisory Panels.

We also held three virtual public engagement workshops, and we also launched an online feedback tool, where we gathered comments, and so, during each of these sessions, we asked eight targeted questions. The first question was has there been any substantial changes in the fishery in recent years, and we asked fishermen to describe the timing, location, and reason for change. We asked if there had been changes in effort or fishing techniques that were used to target the species. We asked if there had been changes in migratory patterns or behaviors of the different species. We asked if there had been changes in discard trends.

We asked, specifically in each sector, how recent changes to the stocks have affected economic performance. We also asked how recent changes had affected behavior for each sector, and we also asked fishermen to provide feedback on the appropriateness of our current regulations and catch limits, and we also asked if there was any environmental ecological factors or recent events that influenced each of the species.

I've just -- Instead of sort of reading this entire report, which is included in your briefing material, what I've done for today is I've organized the comments that we got into themes that we heard across all of the different sessions, and I've organized them by species, and so I'll just go through those really quickly for you all.

Across all species, we did have a couple of themes emerge, and so we heard that all three species are experiencing some decline in abundance or the size of available fish. We did hear changes in migratory patterns seem to be occurring in relationship to timing, area, as well as the size of the schools that our fishermen are seeing. We heard that, recreationally, none of the three species are a primary target species, because they're not as readily available as they used to, and this is a departure from historical behavior.

We heard that the removal of rig structure has disrupted fish movement and their targetability in the Gulf. We also heard that bait that is used to attract fish, or that typically has attracted fish, has either disappeared in inshore environments, or is not as available, or has even changed location, and that is changing the availability of these target species.

We heard that shark depredation is driving increased release mortality. We heard that, commercially, there's an increase in competition for fish in the southern zone and a decline in pressure in our Western zone. We heard that fishing regulations are not limiting harvest, that it's ecological challenges, and decreased availability of the species, that are preventing catch limits from being reached.

We also heard that changes in salinity, water temperature, habitat degradation, harmful algal blooms, and an area of low dissolved oxygen are what's driving population declines and impacting migratory behavior, and we also heard that current catch limits are appropriate for all species. However, some regulatory changes were suggested.

Then I'll just quickly go into sort of what we heard that was species specific, starting first with king mackerel, and so we heard king mackerel seemed to be found further offshore than usual, that people are fishing for king mackerel less than ever, because the fish just aren't available. We heard that charter fishing vessels are no longer selling targeted king mackerel trips, that the king mackerel

stock has been in decline for a number of years, although some areas did report slight improvement recently.

We heard that the commercial king mackerel fishery remains economically viable, because the increased ex-vessel price, due to decreased supply, has kept pace with increasing costs. We heard that it does take more time, fuel, and effort to find keeper king mackerel. We heard that participation in king mackerel tournaments is declining, that king mackerel migration has steadily moved north in the Keys.

We heard that rig removal has impacted king mackerel migration, that the lack of structure in the northern Gulf has made king mackerel less available. We heard that bait is not available, and that has contributed to the reduced presence of king mackerel. We also heard that poor water quality and removal of structure are thought to contribute to the decline in king mackerel populations.

Now, we heard much less input on Spanish mackerel. Specific to Spanish, we did hear that populations seem unchanged, or stable, in some regions. We also heard that there is a lack of structure in the northern Gulf, and that's making them less available, and then, again, we heard that bait is not as available as it used to be, and that is reducing the presence of Spanish.

Finally, when it comes to cobia, some of the themes that we pulled out were that they seem to be found farther offshore than usual, that people are fishing for them less than ever, because the fish aren't available. Again, that charter vessels are not selling targeted trips for cobia, and that the fall cobia run in the northern Gulf is better than the spring run, which is essentially non-existent, and so, really, people were saying that, in the spring -- The spring cobia run used to be a big deal, and it's no longer happening.

We heard that cobia have disappeared in the northern Gulf, except for in just a few spots off of Louisiana, but we did hear that cobia populations seem to be remaining kind of healthy in south Florida. We heard that the fall cobia run has been improving in recent years. We heard that it takes more time, fuel, and effort to find keeper cobia. We heard that the cobia tournaments in the Gulf are nearly gone, and we heard that cobia fishing is non-existent in the Florida Panhandle, where formally it was essentially a way of life for folks.

We did hear that rig removal is impacting cobia migration and that, again, the loss of bait, poor water quality, and removal of structure are thought to contribute to the declines in cobia populations, and I think that sort of wraps it up. I'm happy to answer any questions.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you so much, Emily. Do we have any questions? I'm not seeing any questions, but thank you so much for your presentation, Emily. I really appreciate it.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: Thanks for having me. Have a great day.

MR. ROLLER: All right. Well, with that presentation complete, we're a little ahead of schedule. Our next item of business is to go to the mackerel port meetings next steps, and I'm going to hand it over to Christina.

MS. WIEGAND: Thank you, and so, next up, we're going to be talking about sort of how we move forward from all of this information we were able to gather through mackerel port meetings,

and so, just as the briefest of reminders, there were a couple of things that the council put on hold in favor of doing mackerel port meetings first, and so, now that port meetings have sort of wrapped, and are complete, we need to go back and talk about how we would like to address those two things, as well as talk about how the council would like to move forward with all of the recommendations they received from port meetings.

In March, you got sort of the tip-of-the-iceberg report for port meetings, and, in this one, we're going to go into a bit more detail about what was specifically said by stakeholders about different possible management actions, and so, with that, there are sort of three things that are objectives for this meeting.

The first is to get an update on the CMP goals and objectives and SEDAR 78, which was the Atlantic Spanish mackerel assessment. These are the two things that you all put on hold in favor of doing port meetings. Then we're going to talk about which topics you would like staff to develop actions and alternatives for, and then select sort of the preferred timeline for the amendment development, and I will note, based on some conversations this morning, we have sort of looped addressing SEDAR 78 and port meetings all in one.

There's nothing to say that they have to be. The decision to move forward or not move forward with SEDAR 78 catch level recommendations can be separate from the decision with what you want to move forward with for port meetings, and so keep that in mind as we sort of go down this list of things.

First off are the CMP FMP management goals and objectives. This is something that we would need to work on in collaboration with the Gulf Council. Again, the CMP FMP is jointly managed by the South Atlantic Council and the Gulf Council, and so any changes to these goals and objectives need to be approved by both councils. I'm not going to go over this in great detail yet. As we move further along in the management process. We can talk about them in more detail, but I did want to sort of show them here.

The objectives that you see in yellow are modified, and have already been approved by both the Gulf and the South Atlantic Council. They just haven't been formally included in the FMP yet. The ones in green, these are ones that have been recommended for removal by the Gulf Council, but not addressed by this council, and so eventually this council will need to have a discussion about whether or not we would also like to consider removing those goals and objectives.

Then, finally, that blue color is an additional objective that was added and approved by both the Gulf Council and the South Atlantic Council, and so, again, I didn't want to go into too much detail here, but I did want to remind you that this is going to be part of the amendment discussion and recommend that you sort of look these over and consider what you think the goals and objectives of the CMP FMP should be, especially as we move forward with addressing everything from port meetings. I'll pause briefly, to see if there's any burning questions about the goals and objectives, but, again, we'll talk about them in quite a bit more detail once we start developing an actual amendment.

Okay. I'm not seeing any hands, and so next up is SEDAR 78. This is the Atlantic Spanish mackerel stock assessment and catch level recommendations, and so, again, just as a very brief refresher, SEDAR 78 was completed in June 2022, with a data terminal year of 2020.

I'm not going to go into detail about all of the back and forth between the SSC and the Science Center, but there was some back and forth between the two entities, that took some time, and that's why ultimately the council did not get ABC recommendations until June of 2023 from the SSC, and, ultimately, the SSC did determine that SEDAR 78 was sufficient for providing stock status, which is not overfished or undergoing overfishing.

Then they provided catch level recommendations using the model output, but not projections, and so, if you scroll down here, you can see the ABC recommendations coming out of the SSC, and I do want to note here that this stock assessment included an update from CHTS to FES, and so, when you're looking at the current ABC, sort of that six million pounds, and the recommended ABC of eight million pounds, note that those aren't equivalent numbers. They're not comparable, because one is in CHTS and one is in FES.

Then I will just sort of note here, before opening it up for discussion, that, if you'll remember from when we first started talking about this back in 2023, this new recommended ABC of eight million pounds is likely to be restrictive for both the commercial and recreational sector. That analysis is obviously dated now, since it was done back in 2023. Moving forward, we would update it, but, to help with some of your discussion, I will note that it is likely to be restrictive on both sectors.

MR. ROLLER: All right. Do we have any questions about this? I think this is a good time to talk about some of the AP recommendations too, moving forward. What does the committee think? Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Correct me if I'm wrong, but wasn't the AP suggesting that we wait on this until the new FES numbers come out? I just want to make sure that I understand what they were recommending to us.

MR. ROLLER: Absolutely. That was the recommendation. They felt that, given the restrictive nature of this -- Like, if we think back to why we decided not to go forward with the framework, if I remember correctly, and not speaking for the whole council, but there was a lot of concern that we would be seeing an early closure in the recreational fishery.

MS. WIEGAND: I do want to just note there's been a lot of talk about sort of a closure of the recreational fishery. Right now, there is no in-season closure in the accountability measures for recreational Spanish mackerel. It is a post-season accountability measure, and that accountability measure says that, if the recreational ACL is exceeded, and the total ACL is exceeded, then the bag limit would be reduced, in order to achieve the ACT, but not exceed the ACL, and so, for the recreational sector, under the current AMs, and that's not to say that you couldn't change them, but, under the current AMs, we would be looking at a reduction in bag limit.

The second thing I want to note, and I should have noted this earlier for discussion, is the next Spanish mackerel stock assessment is not on the books until, tentatively, the second half of 2029, and so, should that stay where it is, the council would be looking at receiving catch level recommendations in June of 2030, and, of course, a lot can change between now and then, but that's where it's tentatively on the SEDAR schedule now.

MR. ROLLER: Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Could we change where that is in the SEDAR schedule, such that we maybe slot it in after we get the new FES numbers, and so is that a possibility, because I agree that seems like it's pretty far away, but I would like to bring in those new FES numbers, and so I'm just wondering if we should have a conversation about changing where it is in the schedule.

MR. ROLLER: I've got Kerry in the queue, but do we want to touch on that point first, before we move forward with another comment? Okay. Chip is going to come to the table.

DR. COLLIER: So, at our next SEDAR meeting, we are going to be talking about a species for 2027. You all had requested taking the vermilion snapper update off of that, and so that could be a species that you would consider to fill that slot.

MR. ROLLER: Yes, and I think that's good. I mean, we'll have to have the discussion, but yes. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Clay and I were just having a little sidebar, and so, just kind of walking through the scientific advice, the MRIP pilot I think is going to go through peer review this fall. Results will be available, I think, at the start of next year, or early next year, with calibration. We're talking about an assessment down the road of several years. I'm wondering if this would be more of an update assessment, plugging in the FES, if there's a capacity by the Science Center to do that, that reflects, obviously, the new pilot survey results.

MR. ROLLER: Clay.

DR. PORCH: I mean, obviously, we're talking about updating a lot of assessments with the new FES statistics, and I think what's going to have to happen now is we kind of go back to the drawing board. Since we have reduced capacity, it's not clear, to me, whether we can leverage other assets, you know, get, in other words, other stock assessment scientists from elsewhere to help, but there's also the processing the data and all that, and so I think we're just going to kind of have to triage all the assessments that we want to get done and work with council staff to see if we can come up with a schedule that we can accommodate.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Clay. I'm going to bring up a point here on the AP discussion. There was a lot of concern regarding the current FES numbers. Now, what has been brought to my attention, in recent weeks, was looking at North Carolina's 2024 Spanish mackerel landings. They are the highest in the forty-year time series, which is kind of defying logic, from us fishermen and what we were experiencing, and I'm not saying the Spanish mackerel fishing was poor. It just necessarily wasn't that good, and it was also a year of considerably reduced effort, due to economic factors, and so that's something I would like the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries staff to at least look into, to see if we can figure out why landings were at a forty-year high, because I think we have some big concerns there. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, and, to that point, I think DMF staff is aware of that, and we will be looking into it, but thanks for bringing that up, and I'll make sure that we will look into it.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Trish, and they had reached out to me about that, starting a discussion is to look into that, and so do we have any other questions or discussion here, as we figure out how we want to move forward? I think we're getting some clarification. Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I guess I would like to wait, instead of trying to bring in these wonky numbers, and so I would postpone work on bringing this in.

MR. ROLLER: I'm seeing some heads nodding. I heard a couple people say they agree. Okay. I'm seeing a lot of heads nodding, and I think that's a good way to go. While fishermen, you know, whether at the port meetings or at the AP, did raise a lot of concern that they want to see changes to this fishery, I think people were okay, in general, with the status of the fishery now, as opposed to making some major changes without making sure we have the input that we feel that we need.

Does everybody feel that that's reflective of our discussion? I'm going to say I think it is, and so I'm seeing some heads nodding. Okay. Any more discussion or questions here? So, without any other questions or comments, that's basically what we needed to go, and so the port meetings. Yes, and keep going. Sorry, Christina.

MS. WIEGAND: So, even with sort of the direction to staff to not move forward with SEDAR 78 and the catch level recommendations at this time, there were a number of different management ideas that were brought forward to the council during the port meetings process, and so what I've done here is done my best to sort of summarize each possible management action that was discussed, where sort of the Mid-Atlantic North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida stood, and then put in an overall takeaway.

In the interest of time, I'm just going to go over the overall takeaway, but the more detailed information by region is there, if needed, and what we would be looking for from you all today is simply a yes, in the port meetings response amendment, we would like to see actions and alternatives related to this topic, and then the plan would be, at the next meeting, to bring you back some actions and alternatives based on some of the ideas put forth at port meetings for you to consider.

This isn't necessarily saying we're for sure going to change sector allocations for shadow shark. We're just saying, yes, we want to see what those options might look like at a future meeting, and so, really, sort of for each topic, it's a, yes, bring back some actions and alternatives for us to see or, no, don't bring back any actions and alternatives, and we're not going to move forward with that at all.

MR. ROLLER: Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm going to ask dumb questions here, and so I know we did that exercise earlier, and I'm trying to think about -- Because some of these things seem more regulatory, and not deregulatory, and are we really going to move forward with a bunch of these right now, and so I'm just bringing that conversation back up again, to figure out where we want to go, because we just said don't bring in those catch level recommendations, and then how we're -- In light of everything that we talked about earlier, you know, how are we going to handle this?

MR. ROLLER: Yes, and that's a reasonable question. I mean, you always worry about losing, you know, all the input that people put in, but what are we going to do, right? Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, I don't know that the input is lost, and, I mean, maybe we can just put this back in the schedule at a later date, like we've done with some of these other items, that we push it out for some amount of time, maybe until after we get new numbers for Spanish mackerel. I don't know that this information is going to be stale.

I feel like we haven't done anything like this in many years, talking to these particular fishermen, and it's likely that they're going to have these same comments, you know, a year or so from now. I don't necessarily know that, you know, it's bad that we went out and talked to them, and we got a bunch of this information, but the regulatory environment and other things have changed, and so I just wanted to have us have the conversation here.

MR. ROLLER: That's fair, and I'll go back to my previous statement. I said we didn't -- We're not going to lose the input, but it's just not going to be as fresh, right, and so that's what I think we always have to consider. Amy.

MS. DUKES: I'm just curious too how all this is going to play out as the Gulf -- As the Gulf continues, their discussions, since this is jointly managed, and how is that going to play into this, is a question, I guess.

MR. ROLLER: Jessica, were you going to answer to that point?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, I was going to ask C.J., and didn't you all just take final action on something last week, and I think it was on Spanish.

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes, and it was on the Spanish mackerel catch limits, but it was for the Gulf portion of it.

MR. ROLLER: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, I'm not sure all has to be lost here, based on the input that you received, and I think this is where you have to be thoughtful, and careful, about just quickly saying something is regulatory, right, and so, looking at some of the things on the screen, like moving quota between, you know, the northern and southern zone could be a flexibility measure, right, and, you know, it could provide opportunities, you know, and avoiding closures, right, and that's something that, you know, is beneficial to the fishery.

If there's things that the council would want to move forward, I think we just need to be strategic, and we don't want to put everything and the kitchen sink into an amendment, but there might be some, you know, really things that rose to the top, that would be important to move forward, and I think I would still probably pair it with the catch limit increases, if you're going to do that, rather than getting out in front of the catch limit increases.

MR. ROLLER: That's what my next question was going to be, is do we want to pair these with the catch limit, catch limit changes, as we wait for that in the future, but I do agree to that point, in the sense that a lot of the discussion with the fishermen, it isn't regulatory. They want to see better

access. They want to maximize their access to the fishery, want to make it more efficient, and also make it more economically viable for our fishermen up and down the coast, recognizing that these fish are -- The fishery is changing, both in its importance and range.

Do we have any other comments about this? I'm seeing that the committee wants to probably consider this in conjunction with catch level changes. Is that what everyone is thinking? I'm seeing nodding heads. Kerry, you look like you might have a question.

MS. MARHEFKA: No, and it's just this conundrum of thinking about -- Like this is so different than how we've handled things like this in the past, because we have this new introduction of the EO, and then we also -- Which is affecting our workplan, and so like to do these things discretely, versus like all at one time, is too much for my peabrain. That's why I have the look on my face. It's like I'm picturing the workplan, and I'm picturing what I know needs to be a priority, versus, you know, what isn't necessarily a priority, and so that's why I look like this, which is to say I don't have an answer.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you. I have to think about that for a second. I guess, to kind of ask it a little bit rhetorically, you're saying that, if we're going to take these actions, we should take them together, and is that what you're saying? Sure?

MS. MARHEFKA: Sure, and I just don't know when. I'm not saying I can promise you when I think that that is appropriate for that to happen. That, for me, is a discussion then that harkens back to the workplan.

MR. ROLLER: I think it goes -- But it also goes back to the comments of our AP, who was very steadfast in that they didn't want to move forward with major changes until we can update some of these numbers. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: This is probably a question for Bob. How is this going to play -- What we decide here today play in towards ASMFC? Can Bob answer?

MR. BEAL: Great. Thanks, Trish. You know, the commission's intention has been to trail behind the council, let the council take the lead on this, and I think that will still be intention of the Coastal Pelagic Management Board, and so you know, if -- There are some fundamental differences between the interstate plan and the council plan, such as the northern and southern zones on the commercial side are defined differently. The starting date for the recreational season, I believe, are different, and there's, I don't know, three or four others, like allowable gears and accountability measures and things, but I don't think those differences right now are preventing the council plan from attaining its goals.

In other words, I don't think there's anything urgent the commission needs to do to make sure the council plan is still working in the interim, and so I think our board is comfortable waiting for this council. They want to -- they want to know -- They don't want to start a management action until they have a good sense of the direction the council is going in, and then we'll trail behind and address the inconsistencies, as well as, you know, make sure that we're consistent with anything new that the council does through the new amendment. Is that helpful, Trish?

MS. MURPHEY: Yes. Thank you.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you for that, Bob. Do I have any other comments, or questions, about this? I know we have a lot of confusion, and I guess what I'm getting from the committee is we don't want until -- We don't want to wait until 2029 before we take some action. We want to do things as soon as we can, but we're just worried that we just don't know when that's going to be, whether it's, you know, next year, early or late, right? Bob.

MR. BEAL: Thank you, Mr. Chair. One more thing. You know, I think our board would be comfortable with the notion of waiting until they have the new recalibrated FES numbers. You know, doing much right now just doesn't seem to make any sense. I think our board, and the states on that board, would be comfortable waiting for all those new numbers, and then see what happens with the potential for a 2027 assessment through SEDAR.

MR. ROLLER: That's very helpful. Jessica, do you have your hand up?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I was just going to add more to this. I was going back through the AP report, and rereading their motion and what they were recommending, and, yes, I think that the direction to staff, that's typed up there, is where I would be, especially after reading some of the AP's very specific direction, because there's some items in this list, like don't consider allocation, or reallocation, until you get these new catch numbers in there, and so there were a lot of things that were like caveated, like we might be okay with this, but don't consider this until after this, and so I think that how you articulated it a minute ago, Tom, was -- That was accurate as to what the AP said, and I think that the direction on the screen there goes with what the AP was saying, too.

MR. ROLLER: Okay. Thank you, and so I think, you know, we've had some discussion here, and we're sort of having some more comments, and I think we're starting to get a good direction on how we want to move forward with this. I think folks are, obviously, frustrated that it's taking a long time to move forward with Spanish mackerel, but, if we're going to do it, we've got to do it right, which I think is the most important takeaway.

Christina and I are discussing up here, and, if this is the direction we want to go, we don't need to go through the rest of the amendment at this time, until we get more direction, given, you know, recalibration and whatnot, and is the committee okay with that? I'm seeing some more enthusiastic head nodding, and so okay. Good. All right then. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I'm fine with that direction. I guess, if the committee is okay with it, what I would also recommend is, when this comes back to us, if staff could start looking at the actions from a deregulatory kind of routine regulatory aspect, so that we could then take a hard look at what we want to move forward in that, you know, spectrum of, obviously, different suggested activities.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you for that. I think that's really helpful. When would you want that to come back?

MR. STRELCHECK: I think timing would probably be next year, and not necessarily having a special committee meeting until then.

MR. ROLLER: Next year. I'll let Christina type this up, and so stock assessment results, or are the -- We're looking for clarification, whether it's stock assessment or FES update. I mean, the FES update is a little bit more clear than a stock assessment update, correct? Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I think that was that was the guidance from the AP, right, was to revisit this after we got an update on the FES information.

MR. ROLLER: Andy, are you okay with that? Okay. I got a thumbs-up. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I just want to kind of bring up a couple of things. I mean, I'm good with this decision, but, just to make sure we've talked this out fully, I wonder if there are some things in here we could do now, without the update, because one thing that jumped out at me was the -- I think it was changing the fishing year. I mean, that actually may -- I know that the main drive was if we could -- With the south having so much quota, and the north not so much, and shifting that fishing year, so that we can potentially get a quota transfer, that would then help our fishermen. I -- You know, I kind of wonder, and do we -- Are we sure we want to do this, or do you want to -- Is there anything in here -- That was one that jumped out at me, because I thought about that one, but are there things in here that we could do that doesn't really depend on the numbers?

Anyway, just throwing that out. I mean, I'm good if we hold off, but I just -- Just for, you know, the interest in fully discussing this, and I just didn't know if there might be some things we could move forward with now, that may be helpful to the fishery, because I know, you know, the north has been fishing it out pretty quickly, and having to go to the 500-pound trip limit, and it may be helpful to the north, and so just to throw that out. I know Florida might have -- Because Florida is who we talk to as far as transfer, and so I don't know what their thoughts may be, and the end result -- If this is what we want to do, I'm fine with that, but I just kind of -- For full disclosure, as far as discussing this.

MR. ROLLER: Before I go to Jessica, just let me see if I get this right, and so, Trish, what you're asking is perhaps there are some items in here that we could look at, and maybe put in a more -- Something like -- Are you saying like a framework or something, if we can pull out some of these items, at least for discussion points, and is that what you're asking?

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, and that's correct.

MR. ROLLER: Okay, and so, Jessica, do you want to speak to that point?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, first, I would ask staff, and is changing the allocation between the northern zone and the southern zone -- I believe that some of the discussion from port meetings was redefining the zones, and so there's a lot of other things and strings here tied to this, but I just have some concerns with maybe pulling out one action, because maybe that's ultimately affected by the FES numbers, and I don't -- I'm just a little concerned here, but there were other actions about redefining the zones.

I guess I would say there is a mechanism now, you know, to continue to request quota from the southern zone, and, from what I can tell, it looks like we haven't been using it, and there's, you know, been discussion at the AP about why not, and so it could be space launches, and it could be other -- It could be weather, and it could be other things, but maybe, if you all are continuing to

catch it quickly, you know, reach out as soon as you think you need it, and maybe we can do an analysis of our last few years' worth of landings, and how fast it's caught, and look at that a little bit more.

MR. ROLLER: Christina, did you want to touch on that, before I go to Trish?

MS. WIEGAND: I was just going to note, in terms of how these, you know, sort of different actions would be affected by the FES pilot study, and a new stock assessment, it's, obviously, primarily the recreational numbers, but also sort of the overall ABC can be affected, which does, in a sense, also affect the commercial sector.

MS. MURPHEY: I get that, but that's why I'm thinking -- We've got operating as-is, and we've got -- You have -- The south has one-million-point-something, and we have 600,000, and so those numbers aren't going to change until we change the ABC, and so just the example, and, you know, when I requested a transfer this year, we had to -- You know, you guys wanted to wait until October before you transferred it to us, and then that was too late for our fishery, and so if the seasons -- If the fishing year is changed, so that what -- I think the suggestion was October or November, and then you would know by then what you could transfer to us, if you -- If we asked, and if you would, and so it's just because, last year, we had --

By the time you were able to transfer to us, it was too late, and so that's where I was coming from on that, and just trying -- To me, the FES stuff isn't going to impact those numbers. We got those numbers now, and so it's really about that transfer, or that fishing year, and so, anyway, that's -- I just wanted to bring that up, because it looks like that could be something, and I don't know if it's quick and easy to make a change like that or not, or we can, you know, just hold off, but I just felt that I needed to bring that up and ask about it.

MR. ROLLER: Some of the logic that was discussed was that, if you change the fishing year, and the south fishes first, you'll know if you have rollover, essentially, right, for the northern zone..

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, and then that -- There's the potential there that we could get a transfer from the south to the north, and that would let our guys be -- You know, fish a little longer.

MR. ROLLER: Andy has had his hand up for a while.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so there's definitely some regulatory components to this that could be beneficial. I'm also thinking of this as not having to take a council action, if there's ways that we could facilitate, you know, the smoother conversation, or transfer, or transition between, obviously, the northern and southern, you know, Spanish mackerel.

I recognize -- I think, in recent years, the request has been made, and you, Jessica, don't want -- There's a risk, obviously, of transferring that quota prematurely, and then bumping up against the catch level, and so having to wait until there's certainty, and then it's too late, obviously, for North Carolina, and so is there anything that could be kind of done in the interim, that's non-regulatory, that could just help that coordination, and maybe increase the confidence of being able to make the transfer if those fish are available?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, I guess I would say -- So we're basically making a transfer based on a guess of Florida's effort, because we're doing this later, you know, later in the year than when North Carolina is, and so, by the time that we have a better idea, as you heard from Trish, it's too -- It's really too late for them, because they're kind of done fishing.

I will say that, when we go look at this, we look at effort from past years, and, you know, what time of year the fish are coming in, and those things, and I would say, the last few years, we haven't been using our quota, and so I might feel a little bit more confident about transferring that quota, because we now have a couple of years where Florida hasn't used it.

MR. ROLLER: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Jessica, if we're seeing an increased opportunity of having a transfer, based off your past data, I mean, North Carolina would appreciate it, and we wouldn't have to go through this, but, you know, if we can work together more, and is there still fish there, and I think, you know, the bottom line is there's fish there, but then the timing is off, and so that's -- I know that was your concern when we discussed this last year.

MR. ROLLER: So I guess my question is, if we're going to discuss it, how do we do that, right? Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: There's already a mechanism in place to do that. That already exists. There's nothing that would need to be done relative to the amendment at this time. The mechanism already exists.

MR. ROLLER: Okay. Good clarification. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I understand the mechanism exists. I guess, and maybe we can talk offline, but, from North Carolina's perspective, is there kind of like a drop dead, like, in order for us to be able to actually use quota, there would be a certain timing component to this, based on availability of fish in your area?

MR. ROLLER: Go ahead, Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I think we are -- Let's see. We have closed in June, and we've gone as late as August, and so, I mean, it's, I think, spring and summer.

MR. ROLLER: Obviously, that would be simplified with a fishing year change, but that's another course of action. Go ahead.

MS. WIEGAND: So I put up on -- Not so much as direction to staff, but just a note that North Carolina DMF and FWC will sort of continue to communicate and better coordinate on the potential of those yearly commercial quota transfers for Atlantic Spanish mackerel between the two zones. Does that sort of properly capture the conversation?

MR. ROLLER: I'm looking to Trish and Jessica, and does this kind of capture our discussion?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm good with that.

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, and I'm good, too.

MR. ROLLER: Okay, and assuming like, in this discussion, if there were some ideas that came forward, obviously, we could discuss them further, right, at another time. Okay. Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: Well, thanks for indulging me on that conversation.

MR. ROLLER: No, and I think that this is really important, and this is something our -- Particularly our northern zone fishermen have been discussing for a very long time, and this is, obviously, a fishery that has seen a lot of regional, or geographic, change in recent years. All right, and so we've had some good discussion here. Do we have any other comments, or concerns, questions? I'm assuming we're not going to go -- We're going to continue with not going through the rest of the amendment, given the previous discussion? All right, and so, if the committee doesn't have any more comments here, I guess we can wrap up this part of the conversation.

All right, and the only thing we have left is Other Business. Do we have any other business? I have one little thing I'm going to bring up, but do we have anything else from anybody in Other Business? Okay.

The only thing I want to bring up is I just want to mention the AP did make a motion to look at Atlantic bonito for CMP inclusion, and I think we just deserve a couple minute conversation on that. I will -- Just to give a little bit of background, that came from a North Carolina commercial member who is seeing some -- Has some concerning issues with the fishery. We've seen a lot of increased harvest in North Carolina, particularly in the recreational sector.

I will add a couple of things. This is something the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission is discussing, which is just looking at putting a general bag limit on currently. DMF staff, NC DMF staff, is developing a white paper on that. I will add that my knowledge of the fishery is that it's primarily a North Carolina to Massachusetts fishery.

South Carolina does have some landings, but, while Florida used to have them, decades ago, I believe they're almost net zero now, and so, I mean, you know, for someone who has advocated for managing -- You know, looking at management for unmanaged species, the only thing I will add is that I'm not sure the South Atlantic is the best fit for this species, given its range, and the fact that it's mostly caught in state waters, and not to add the fact that we're in a more deregulatory environment now. Does anybody have anything they would like to add on that, or any other discussion? I just wanted to bring it up. You know, if AP gives us a motion, I think we deserve a little bit of conversation. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: For the sake of, you know, acknowledging the AP's request, and understanding it, I would just say we're in a situation where we're removing species from FMU. We're unable to assess the species that we have on our plate right now, and, if there aren't landings throughout our range, it seems -- If North Carolina is already looking at it, it seems that, at this time, we are not the appropriate vehicle for looking at management for bonito.

MR. ROLLER: Seeing nodding heads here, and I would -- I would tend to agree. I really appreciate the AP bringing this for discussion, because it is a fishery that mixes with these current

fisheries, and it is really important to our North Carolina fishermen in particular, and it is a growing abundance, and they're seeing a lot of landings in South Carolina as well. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: They're not managed by the Mid-Atlantic or New England Councils, correct?

MR. ROLLER: There's no management of them. Massachusetts just put in some state management bag limits, as of just recently, a couple months ago.

MR. STRELCHECK: I guess the question would be, given the AP brought this forward, and we don't think it's relevant, or appropriate, for us to manage, and should we at least also offer this recommendation to those other councils for consideration, that it was brought to our attention by our advisory panel?

MR. ROLLER: I mean, that's something worth considering. I think it would look at to see where these landings take place, in state or federal waters, right, and, Charlie, did you want to touch on that?

MR. PHILLIPS: I am not on your committee, but -- Am I? I forget. I lose track. Anyway, and it doesn't matter. You know, we catch a few, and it's offshore in Georgia. It's incidental catch, but there is beginning to be a market for them. There's not a lot of money. It's still an incidental catch, but, again, in this environment, I don't think we can add anything else to our FMUs, but you're right that it's something to be watched.

MR. ROLLER: I guess my question would be are they -- Are those landings tracked in the unmanaged forage fish amendment? That's a good question, and I'm not sure, but -- Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I mean, I'm just referring to the spreadsheet, or the paper, that John distributed earlier in this week, that came from the Mid last week, that looks at the unmanaged commercial landings, and, as long as I am understanding that that is the commonly acceptable name, because I know sometimes different regions use different names --

MR. ROLLER: To be clear, we're talking about Atlantic benito, Sarda sarda.

MS. MARHEFKA: Okay. This document only has common name, and I'm just thinking of like pink snapper and Carolina snapper and red porgy are all the same thing, and so, if it's not called something else in the Mid, then it is not even showing up in the unmanaged commercial landings in the Mid, is what I'm trying to tell you.

MR. ROLLER: Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I took a look at that list as well. I don't think I saw it in there. I can go through it again, but I mean, this might -- If we could get something like this for our council, and this thing was really cool, and it would allow us to track some of these species that the APs are bringing up that they may or may not be concerned about, and so I love that report, that they do one time a year. I wish that we could have something like that, and I don't know how to get it.

MR. ROLLER: I will say that was a product of a very elaborate amendment, but that was only part of the amendment, the omnibus forage fish amendment. To that, Kerry?

MS. MARHEFKA: We don't have to get in the weeds now, but I think one of the ways is how they collect it, because I'm picturing our coastal logbook, and there are certainly species you're going to encounter, and they're not all on that logbook, and so how would they be reported? You would have to amend, at least commercially, that logbook.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I take back what I said. It sounds too hard.

MR. ROLLER: I think this is worthy of future discussions. I mean, I think it's hard for me, from what I know about the fishery, to say that we should be writing a letter to another council at this time, I mean, because we don't really know the clear range, in state or federal waters, but I think it's worth having a discussion further, at another time anyway, and so -- Bob.

MR. BEAL: Thank you. Just so folks know, ASMFC talked about benito, and I don't know, three or four years ago, or maybe a little more even, about developing an interstate fishery management plan. The states got together and sort of developed a characterization of that fishery, and what the landings look like and other things, and I can share that, but, ultimately, the commission decided not to put together an interstate FMP, and a lot of it had to do with the lack of a stock assessment.

They just agreed to have individual states, you know, implement regulations on their own, and then, as you said, Mr. Chair, two states have done that, North Carolina and Massachusetts, so far. I don't know if there's regulations pending in other states, but the commission has talked about this, and decided not to get into benito management, for a number of reasons.

MR. ROLLER: Well, thank you for that, Bob. I will just correct one little thing, is North Carolina implemented for little tunny, false albacore, but we are discussing Atlantic benito, and there's a bunch of enthusiastic support for it, but what I will say about North Carolina is it's primarily a state waters fishery. They're very close to shore, and so thank you for that clarification. Is there any other Other Business or discussion here? Well, seeing none, I will wrap up this meeting of the Mackerel Cobia Committee. Thank you, everybody. Thank you, Christina.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on June 10, 2025.)

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Amanda Thomas
August 4, 2025

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Newman	Kelley
Oliver	Ashley
Olsen	Butch
Ostroff	Jenny
Ott	Emily
Owens	Marina
Package-Ward	Christina
Peterson	Cassidy
Phillips	Charlie
Poholek	ariel
Potter	Caroline
Potter	Caroline
ROLLER	tom
Ramsay	Chloe
Rapp	Greg

Records	David
Richardson	Eric
Riley	Richard
Runde	Brendan
SCHLICK	CJ
Salmon	Brandi
Sedberry	George
Seward	McLean
Smart	Tracey
Smillie	Nick
Smit-Brunello	00Monica
Spottswood	Robert
Spurgin	Kali
Sridhar	Samy
Stephen	Jessica
Stephens	Haley
Stone	Pat
Sweetman	CJ
Turano	Joseph
Turley	Brendan
Walia	Matt
Walsh	Jason
Walsh	Mick
Walter	John
Webb	Greyson
West	W
Westcott	Lauren
White	Geoff
Wiegand	Christina
Williams	Erik
Williams	Travis
Wilms	Olivia
Wilms	Sean
Withers	Meg
Wolfe	Wes
Woodstock	Matt
Zapf	Daniel
banks	kesley
collier	chip
ealahan	maranda
griner	tim
gwin	sonny
laks	Ira
marinko	Jeff

moss
reynolds
sandorf
tarpley
thomas
vara
vincent
zales

david
kris
Scott
sean
suz
mary
matthew
bob