

Port Meetings for the Commercial and Recreational King and Spanish Mackerel Fisheries



Discussion Document

Background

During their April 2019 meeting and their October 2022 meeting, the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel (AP) passed motions requesting the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) set up a series of port meetings to gather more information on the Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel fisheries. In the past, the South Atlantic Council acknowledged the importance of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the commercial and recreational king and Spanish mackerel fisheries and how port meetings may provide an effective avenue to achieve that understanding. During their December 2022 meeting, the South Atlantic Council directed staff to begin developing a plan for conducting port meetings through out the South Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic and New England regions.

Current Coastal Migratory Pelagics activities on the Council's schedule:

- *Revisions to the objectives in the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan*

Like all Fishery Management Plans (FMPs), the FMP for Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP) in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Regions (CMP FMP) contains a series of objectives to guide management decisions. As the needs of a fishery change over time, fishery management councils are encouraged to regularly reassess the FMP objectives (50 C.F.R. § 600.305(b)). Amendment 6 was the last amendment to modify the objectives of the CMP FMP.

In 2022, the South Atlantic Council and Gulf Council began discussions on how to update the goals and objectives of the CMP FMP to better reflect the current needs of the fisheries. Both councils must concur on the goals and objectives of the CMP FMP before any modifications can be adopted. Objectives highlighted in blue have been approved by the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils but have not been formally adopted. Objectives highlighted in yellow have been recommended for removal by the Gulf Council.

Current Goals of the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan

<i>Objective 1</i>	The primary objective of this FMP is to achieve and maintain optimum yield, to allow recovery of overfished populations, and maintain population levels sufficient to ensure adequate recruitment.
<i>Objective 2</i>	To provide a flexible management system for the resource which minimizes regulatory delay while retaining substantial Council and public input in management decisions and which can rapidly adapt to changes in resource abundance, new scientific information, and changes in fishing patterns among user groups or by areas.
<i>Objective 3</i>	To achieve robust fishery reporting and data collection systems across all sectors for monitoring the coastal migratory pelagic fishery which minimizes scientific, management, and risk uncertainty.
<i>Objective 4</i>	To minimize gear and user group conflicts.
<i>Objective 5</i>	<i>To distribute the total allowable catch of Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel between recreational and commercial user groups based on the catches that occurred during the early to mid-1970s, which is prior to the development of the deep-water run-around gillnet fishery and when the resource was not overfished.</i>
<i>Objective 6</i>	To minimize waste and bycatch in the fishery.
<i>Objective 7</i>	<i>To provide appropriate management to address specific migratory groups of king mackerel.</i>
<i>Objective 8</i>	To optimize the social and economic benefits of the coastal migratory pelagic fisheries.

- *Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Assessment Response*

SEDAR 78 was completed in July 2022 and included an assessment for Atlantic Spanish mackerel. In August 2022 and October 2022, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the results of the updated SEDAR 78 and recommended additional work be completed. A sub-group of the SSC met this winter to outline additional analysis request for the SEFSC with the goal of reviewing an updated assessment and providing catch level recommendations at their April 2023 meeting.

If that assessment is considered best scientific information available at the April 2023 SSC meeting, the amendment development schedule would be as follows:

Date	Amendment Development Step
April 2023	SSC reviews modifications to SEDAR 78 and provides catch level recommendations to the South Atlantic Council.
June 2023	South Atlantic Council reviews SSC recommendations and directs staff to begin work on an amendment.
Fall 2023	Mackerel Cobia AP discusses amendment.
September 2023	South Atlantic Council reviews AP comments and directs staff on actions and alternatives to develop.

Date	Amendment Development Step
December 2023	South Atlantic Council reviews options paper and scoping comments, approves range of actions and alternatives to be analyzed.
March 2024	South Atlantic Council reviews draft document, provides direction to staff.
April 2024	Gulf Council reviews draft document, provides direction to staff.
June 2024	South Atlantic Council reviews draft document, selects preferred alternatives, and approves for public hearings.
August 2024	Gulf Council reviews draft document, selects preferred alternatives, and approves for public hearings.
September 2024	South Atlantic Council reviews public comments.
October 2024	Gulf Council reviews public comments.
December 2024	South Atlantic Council considers amendment for formal review.
January 2025	Gulf Council considered amendment for formal review.

- *Other activities not currently on the schedule but recommended by stakeholders:*

On September 19, 2022, the Council received a letter from the American Saltwater Guides Association requesting they consider re-adding false albacore to the CMP FMP. In December 2022, after considering the Magnuson Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson Stevens Act) criteria for a species in need of conservation and management an input from the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel, the Council directed staff to prepare a fishery performance report for little tunny every three years.

At their October 2022 meeting, the Mackerel Cobia AP requested the Council begin work on an amendment that would remove the current split season for Atlantic king mackerel in the southern zone. Management of Atlantic king mackerel is especially complex and in recent years has been subject to regular small management adjustments.

Objectives for this Meeting

This discussion document is intended to help the South Atlantic Council choose how they would like to go about gaining a comprehensive understanding of the mackerel fisheries via port meetings.

The goal is to *begin* answering these **key questions**:

- What would the Council like to achieve by conducting port meetings? What information is needed for a comprehensive understanding of the king and Spanish mackerel fisheries?
- What is the desired product or outcome of these port meetings?
- What input is needed from stakeholders to achieve this goal?

As well as these more **logistical decision points**:

- What fisheries will be included in the port meetings?
- How does the Council want to refer to this process?
- What kind of process will best achieve the desired outcome within the preferred timeframe?

Mackerel Port Meetings Big Picture

What would the Council like to achieve by conducting port meetings? What information is needed for a comprehensive understanding of the king and Spanish mackerel fisheries?

- A thorough evaluation of current management objectives leading to a revised set of goals and objectives for the CMP FMP.
 - Would the Council like to spend more time discussing the goals and objectives of the CMP FMP before soliciting input from stakeholders or solicit input from stakeholders prior to evaluation?
 - Evaluating the objectives first would be time and cost effective and allow the Council to gather specific information from stakeholders.
 - Soliciting input first promotes transparency and the Council's intent to involve stakeholders but may result in ideas that are not feasible or are outside the Council's purview.
 - Would allow stakeholders to bring forward creative strategies to meet objectives.
- A complete picture of mackerel fishery dynamics (such as stakeholders' perceptions of management performance and how stakeholders are using the resource) that leads to a strategic plan for future management of both the recreational and commercial king and Spanish mackerel fisheries.
 - What would this plan need to focus on?
 - description of current fishery dynamics
 - stakeholder views on current management

COMMITTEE ACTION: PROVIDE INPUT ON HOW THE COUNCIL WOULD LIKE TO APPROACH EVALUATING THE CURRENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CMP FMP AND WHAT INFORMATION IS NEEDED TO UNDERSTANDING FISHERY DYNAMICS.

What is the desired product or outcome of these port meetings?

- Staff can develop a final report that includes notes from all conducted port meetings. In addition to a basic summary, the document could include:
 - Thematic analysis identifying patterns and themes among the different port meetings.
- As described above, information from the final report would be used by the Council to update the goals and objectives of the CMP fishery and to modify management measures to better achieve those goals.

COMMITTEE ACTION: PROVIDE INPUT ON THE SUGGESTED PRODUCT AND OUTCOME OF THE PORT MEETINGS.

Mackerel Port Meetings Logistics

What fisheries should be involved in the port meetings?

- Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.
- Florida East Coast Zone Gulf cobia?
- Gulf king and Spanish mackerel?
- Little tunny?

COMMITTEE ACTION: DETERMINE WHICH FISHERIES WILL BE THE FOCUS OF THE MACKEREL PORT MEETINGS.

How does the Council want to refer to this process?

- Staff has been referring to this process simply as the “Mackerel Port Meetings.” As the goal of the process and the focus get narrowed, it may be helpful to have a more specific title for this series of meetings.
- Additionally, the Council may want to consider how they would like to distinguish this process from the Snapper Grouper Visioning process and the currently ongoing MSE processes for the Dolphin Wahoo FMP and the Snapper Grouper FMP.

COMMITTEE ACTION: PROVIDE GUIDANCE TO STAFF ON HOW TO REFER TO THIS SERIES OF PORT MEETINGS.

How will the meetings be structured and facilitated?

- Staff will conduct facilitated meetings in key coastal communities where all stakeholders with fishing interests are invited to participate. Stakeholders may include fishery representatives from private recreational, for-hire, and commercial sectors; conservation groups; and seafood dealers/restaurants.
- The goal would be to schedule these meetings such that they avoid months with high fishing activity for king and Spanish mackerel to increase stakeholder attendance.
 - Should meetings for king and Spanish mackerel be held separately?
 - Should meetings be held separately for each sector?

Months with the highest fishing activity for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel by zone.												
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Northern Zone (North Carolina/South Carolina line to the New York/Connecticut/Rhode Island line)												
King-Commercial												
King – Recreational												
Spanish – Commercial												
Spanish - Recreational												

Months with the highest fishing activity for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel by zone.												
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Southern Zone (North Carolina/South Carolina line to the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line, Florida)												
King-Commercial												
King – Recreational												
Spanish – Commercial												
Spanish - Recreational												

COMMITTEE ACTION: PROVIDE GUIDANCE TO STAFF ON HOW PORT MEETINGS SHOULD BE STRUCTURED AND FACILITATED.

Who would be asked to attend these port meetings?

- Port meetings would be open to the public, allowing all interested stakeholders to attend.
- Council members would be asked to attend port meetings held near their area, with each meeting having a minimum of one to two Council members present.
- Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel members would be asked to attend the port meetings in their area as well as help organize and promote the meetings.

COMMITTEE ACTION: PROVIDE GUIDANCE TO STAFF ON PORT MEETINGS ATTENDANCE.

TENTATIVE timeline for completing port meetings

Note: this timeline was designed with the management response to the Atlantic Spanish mackerel stock assessment in mind. If the associated amendment moves at a slower pace, this timeline could be lengthened.

Date	Port Meeting Step
December 2022	Council directs staff to organize port meetings for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.
March 2023	Council reviews detailed plan for conducting port meetings.
April 2023	Mackerel Cobia AP meeting via webinar to review plan for conducting port meetings.
June 2023	Council reviews AP member input and approves plan for conducting port meetings.
Fall 2023	Port meetings being held throughout the Atlantic regions.
Winter 2023	Port meetings being held throughout the Atlantic regions.
Spring 2024	Port meetings being held throughout the Atlantic regions.
September 2024	Summary report prepared and presented to the Council.

Next Steps

- Based on the information provided by the Council at this meeting, staff will begin to develop a structure for how each port meeting will be facilitated, including a draft list of questions that will be used to guide discussions.
- The Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel will discuss port meetings and provide recommendations on their goals for the process and possible outcomes.
- Staff will begin coordinating with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission as well as the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils, as appropriate.