

**FINAL**  
**MEETING REPORT**  
**MACKEREL COBIA ADVISORY PANEL AND COBIA SUB-PANEL**  
**SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**  
**Webinar**  
**November 2, 2020**

The Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel (MCAP) met to discuss topics supporting management of the coastal migratory pelagics fishery, including Florida east coast zone cobia, Atlantic Spanish mackerel, and Atlantic king mackerel. Below is a summary of the group's discussions and recommendations. The MCAP approved motions for recommendations to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council), but a summary of all viewpoints relevant to each motion/recommendation are included.

**AP Members**

Ira Laks, Chair  
Tom Roller, Vice Chair  
Stephen Swann  
Stephen Donalson  
Steve English\*  
Skip Feller\*  
Ryan Howard\*  
Keith Bowen  
Robert Olsen\*  
Greg Peralta  
Gary Robinson\*  
Dr. Paul Rudershausen  
Rusty Hudson  
Aaron Kelly  
John Mallette\*  
Brad Phillips\*  
Thomas Newman  
Charles Locke

**Council Members**

Mell Bell, Council Chair  
Steve Poland, Council Vice Chair  
Chris Conklin  
Spud Woodward

**Council Staff**

Christina Wiegand, CMP Lead  
Dr. Mike Schmidtke  
Dr. Chip Collier  
Cameron Rhodes  
Allie Iberle  
John Hadley  
Dr. Brian Chevront  
Myra Brouwer  
Julia Byrd  
Cindy Chaya

\*Not in attendance.

The Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel approved minutes from the October 2019 meeting and the agenda.

**Report from the Council's Mackerel Cobia Committee Chair**

Steve Poland, chair of the Council's Mackerel Cobia Committee, addressed the MCAP. He provided updates on recent Council discussions relevant to Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP). Additionally, he thanked MCAP members for taking the time to provide the Council with their expert feedback, especially during these uncertain and challenging times.

## **SEDAR 38 Updated Assessment and Management Recommendations (Coastal Migratory Pelagics Framework Amendment 10)**

An update to SEDAR 38 was completed in April 2020 and included assessments for Gulf and Atlantic king mackerel. In April 2020, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the results of the updated SEDAR 38 and provided recommendations for new acceptable biological catches (ABCs) for Atlantic king mackerel. At their June 2020 meeting the Council received presentations from the SEFSC and the SSC chair regarding the completed assessment. The Council directed staff to begin work on an options paper that would include consideration of sector allocations and catch level adjustments based on SSC recommendations the recent stock assessment update. The MCAP reviewed the assessment results and discussed management measures that should be considered in the upcoming amendment.

The MCAP provided the following input on Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP) Framework Amendment 10:

### *Revisions to the Atlantic King Mackerel Annual Catch Limit*

- The catch levels recommended by the SSC are substantially higher than currently catch levels. Staff noted that previous ABCs and annual catch limits (ACLs) and the proposed ABCs are not directly comparable because the updated assessment includes changes in the recreational catch estimates based on new methodology used in the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP).
- Given the increase in catch levels, the Council should consider accommodating a buffer.
  - If the current catch is not reaching/exceeding the proposed ABC/ACL it makes sense to be cautious. Especially given that data for current and possibly future fishing years may be compromised due to the pandemic.
  - Due to MRIP data coming in waves or being otherwise delayed, a buffer instead of an annual catch target (ACT) would better account for management uncertainty.
  - Increased landings of king mackerel throughout the northern zone (North Carolina/South Carolina line to the New York/Connecticut/Rhode Island line) and into New England is a big source of management uncertainty warranting a buffer.
    - Especially recreationally, intercepts may not occur as often up north resulting in unreliable numbers.
    - Factoring climate change into management is especially important because we do not yet know if king mackerel are shifting northward or if their range is expanding.
- When looking at a buffer, it is important to make sure that commercial and recreational fisheries can remain open year-round.
- An alternative perspective was provided, stating the if landings are increasing in the northern zone a buffer should not be set because it is important to ensure all quota remains available to account for changes in landings.

### *Sector and Area Allocations*

- Overall, the fishery has been functioning well with the current sector allocations, however regional allocations may need to be addressed in the future with changes in landing distributions due to climate change.
- The current allocations are historical and accurately represent the historical fishery. Especially with the increase in proposed catch levels, there is no need to alter sector allocations.
- The priority should be to get accurate recreational landings and discard estimates.
- Commercial king mackerel permits are limited access, helping to control effort in the fishery. It was noted that the price for king mackerel permits has increased in recent years (~\$15,000 per permit).
- It was noted that while there is no need to address regional allocations of king mackerel at this time, there needs to be a system in place to trigger consideration of reallocations related to increases in effort or if a sector/area is reaching its quota early.

**MOTION #1: REQUEST THE COUNCIL DOES NOT CONSIDER REVISING SECTOR OR AREA ALLOCATIONS AT THIS TIME.**

APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

### *Modifications to Current Management Measures: Bag Limits*

- While the available catch is increasing, management measures do not need to be changed to increase recreational harvest. From a recreational perspective, there is nothing wrong with fish being left in the water, especially if it increases interaction rates.
- Under the current recreational bag limit, few for-hire customers want to keep a full limit of king mackerel.
- On the east coast of Florida, the recreational bag limit for king mackerel is 2-fish per person whereas the rest of the Gulf and Atlantic region has a 3-fish per person bag limit. The Council should consider increasing the Florida east coast bag limit to 3-fish per person to make it consistent with the rest of the coast.
  - Occasionally, there is demand for 3-fish per person, especially if king mackerel is all that is biting. The for-hire fleet on the east coast of Florida competes with boats north and south that can catch 3-fish per person.
  - Important that opportunity that is equal for all participants in the fishery.
- It was noted that fishermen in the St. Augustine, Florida have not expressed a desire to increase the bag limit to 3-fish per person.
  - This may be a clientele difference, in south Florida there are customers who prize king mackerel.
- When asked for feedback on the emergency rule implemented in September (4-fish per person bag limit throughout the South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic region) and if an extension was warranted, AP members indicated that the increase did not incentive trips and there was no need to ask for an extension.
- In general, a bag limit higher than 3-fish per person is unnecessary.

### *Modifications to Current Management Measures: Size Limits/Cut Fish*

- While fishermen are not currently keeping their bag limit, in the summer a lot of smaller king mackerel are released as dead discards. Decreasing the minimum size limit may increase recreational landings.
- Young/medium sized king mackerel are often more desirable. They are not targeted, but commonly caught when fishing for larger king mackerel or other species (especially Spanish mackerel).
- King mackerel can occasionally be fragile and released as dead discards.
  - This is especially common when king mackerel are caught incidentally when fishing for Spanish mackerel.
- A minimum size limit of 22-inches +/- an inch should be considered by the Council.
  - Based off the previous SEDAR assessment, 50% of females are mature around 22-inches.
- Currently, commercial fishermen are allowed to keep cut/damaged fish that meet minimum size limits. Given the issue with damaged king mackerel and the increase in shark depredation, this provision should be considered for the recreational sector.
  - Recommendation to mirror the highly migratory species (HMS) regulations for shark mutilated fish.

### **Citizen Science Program Update**

Julia Byrd, Citizen Science Program Manager, presented a brief update on the Council's Citizen Science Program and pilot projects highlighting activities that have occurred since the Fall 2019 Mackerel Cobia AP meeting.

The SAFMC Scamp Release pilot project, which focuses on collecting information on released fish via the use of a mobile app, will be expanding to collect information on all shallow water grouper in 2021. Additionally, as part of the new grant for this project, the Citizen Science Program is planning for the development of a customizable citizen science mobile app. The long-term goal is to develop a menu-driven tool that you could use to create a customizable app by selecting specific data fields, without the need to develop stand-alone apps for each new project or data need. A series of scoping meetings will be held between January and March 2021 to identify data needs and objectives for this app and we are looking for interested fishermen to participate in this process.

The FISHstory pilot project uses historic photos to estimate historic catch and length compositions from the 1940s to 1970s. The FISHstory project launched in Zooniverse in late May 2020. The MCAP was given an update on the project since launch and share information on the methods developed to estimate fish length in historic photos which are being pilot tested on king mackerel.

The MCAP provided the following input on the Citizen Science Program:

- For the FISHstory project, it is important to consider the specific area and gear being used to target king mackerel during the time being examined. This context will be important when comparing one area or time to another. For example, landed fish may

seem larger today, but it is in fact a function of smaller fish intentionally being targeted in the past due to the gear utilized.

- AP members were interested in providing photos for the FISHstory project and contacting other who may be interested in providing photos should the project continue beyond its current scope.
- Staff noted that the roll of the Citizen Science Program is to provide small sections of information to improve stock assessments (for example, discards of scamp) as opposed to working on a large-scale program to overhaul catch estimates.
  - Recommendation to use the citizen science program to estimate discard mortality of king mackerel.

### **Update on Council and SEDAR Actions related to Coastal Migratory Pelagics**

Council staff updated the MCAP on current actions related to CMP species, including: CMP Amendment 32 which will address results from the updated SEDAR 28 assessment, timing for SEDAR 78: Atlantic Spanish mackerel, and recent Council efforts on climate change scenario planning.

The MCAP provided the following input on CMP-related actions:

- The Council should consider mirroring regulations for cobia in Florida state in federal waters.
  - Increasing shark depredation is result in a lot of lost fish as fishermen try to catch their second cobia.
- It is important to understand whether climate change is resulting in an expansion of the range of species or a shifting of range northward.

### **Election of new MCAP Chair and Vice-Chair**

The MC AP chair and vice-chair are appointed for three-year terms. The current chair and vice chair were appointed in April 2017. The MC AP nominated and appointed Ira Laks for a second term as chair and Tom Roller as vice-chair.

**MOTION #2: APPOINT IRA LAKS AS CHAIR AND TOM ROLLER AS VICE CHAIR OF THE MACKEREL COBIA ADVISORY PANEL FOR A THREE-YEAR TERM.  
APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)**

### **Other Business**

#### *Atlantic Spanish Mackerel*

- Increased landings and closures in the northern zone need to be addressed. While the Spanish mackerel stock assessment (SEDAR 78) is on track, it will still be years before results are available and new management measures could be implemented.
  - An amendment to address the situation cannot wait until after the stock assessment.
- It was noted that if effort is increasing, an increase in available catch will not remedy the current closures.

- Regulations changes in North Carolina have helped the fishery. The 500-pounds trip limit allowed in state waters after federal waters close has helped sustain communities that are reliant on the Spanish mackerel fishery in the fall and summer. Additionally, modifications to North Carolina gill net regulations has helped the fishery. Communities in the summer and fall (NC) really rely on the Spanish mackerel fishery.
- Additionally, there are concerns about how the new MRIP numbers will impact estimates of recreational catch.
- There is increased interest in commercial fishing for Spanish mackerel in Virginia – which is likely to increase.

*Representation from the Mid-Atlantic Region*

- For-hire fishermen in the Mid-Atlantic region are required to have a CMP for-hire permit if targeting any CMP species. As landings continue to increase farther north, it will be important to make sure that individuals from that region are able to provide information on what the fishery is like in their area.
  - There are now fishermen actively targeting Spanish mackerel in the New England region, it may be helpful to have participation from fishermen in that area as well.
  - The Mid-Atlantic Council has two representatives that serve on the Council's Mackerel Cobia Committee. The MC AP should have the same representation.

## **Webinar Attendees List**

<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>
Julia	Byrd
Mel	Bell
Alan	Bianchi
Keith	Bowen
Myra	Brouwer
Erika	Burgess
Cindy	Chaya
Brian	Cheuvront
Chris	Conklin
Steve	Donalson
John	Hadley
Frank	Helies
Rusty	Hudson
Allie	Iberle
Kim	Iverson
Aaron	Kelly
Ira	Laks
Charlie	Locke
Thomas	Newman
Kelli	O'Donnell
Greg	Peralta
Stephen	Poland
Cameron	Rhodes
Tom	Roller
Paul	Rudershausen
Michael	Schmidtke
Steve	Swann
Mary	Vara
Spud	Woodward
Chip	Collier