



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Atlantic King and Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Port Meetings Report and Next Steps

March 2025



Goals and Objectives

Throughout 2024 and into 2025 the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council hosted a series of port meetings along the Atlantic coast to take a focused look at the commercial and recreational king and Spanish mackerel fisheries. This effort was conducted at the request of the Council's Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel.

Evaluation of current goals and objectives of the CMP FMP.

Achieving the maximum economic and social yield from the fishery.

Maintaining the long-term sustainability of stocks.

Achieving the most equitable management structure under climate change.

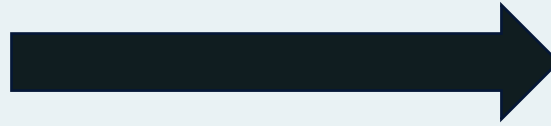
Identification of underserved communities and equity and environmental justice concerns.

Consideration of interjurisdictional management and cooperation with other councils and ASMFC.

Maintaining the integrity of fishing communities under climate change.

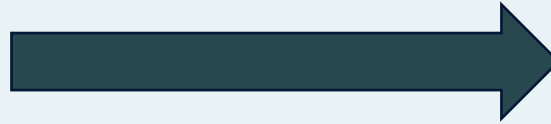
How to read the port meetings report:

I'm interested in what's happening with king and Spanish mackerel along the entire Atlantic coast.



Mackerel Port Meetings
Draft Report

I'm interested in what's happening with king and Spanish mackerel in the state or region.



Mackerel Port Meetings
Draft Report

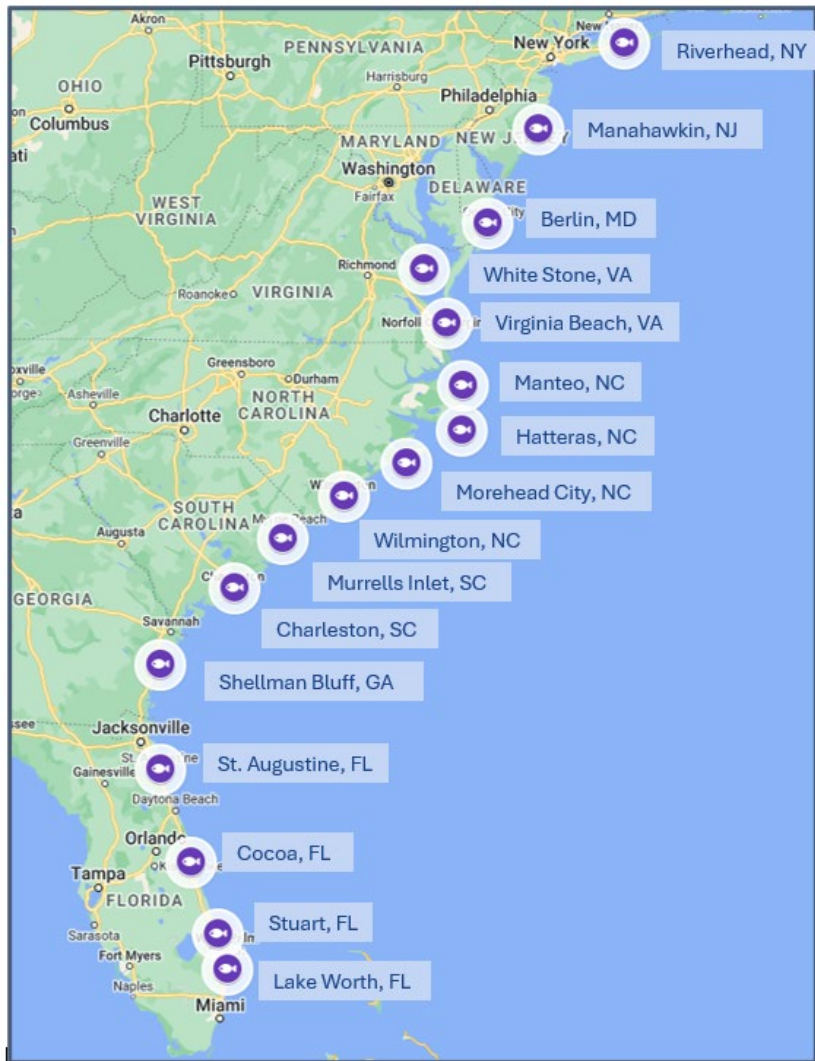
I'm interested in detailed information on king and Spanish mackerel in a specific community.



Mackerel Port Meetings
Final Report: Appendix A

Why is the report still a draft? Awaiting attendee input.

Port Meetings By the Numbers:



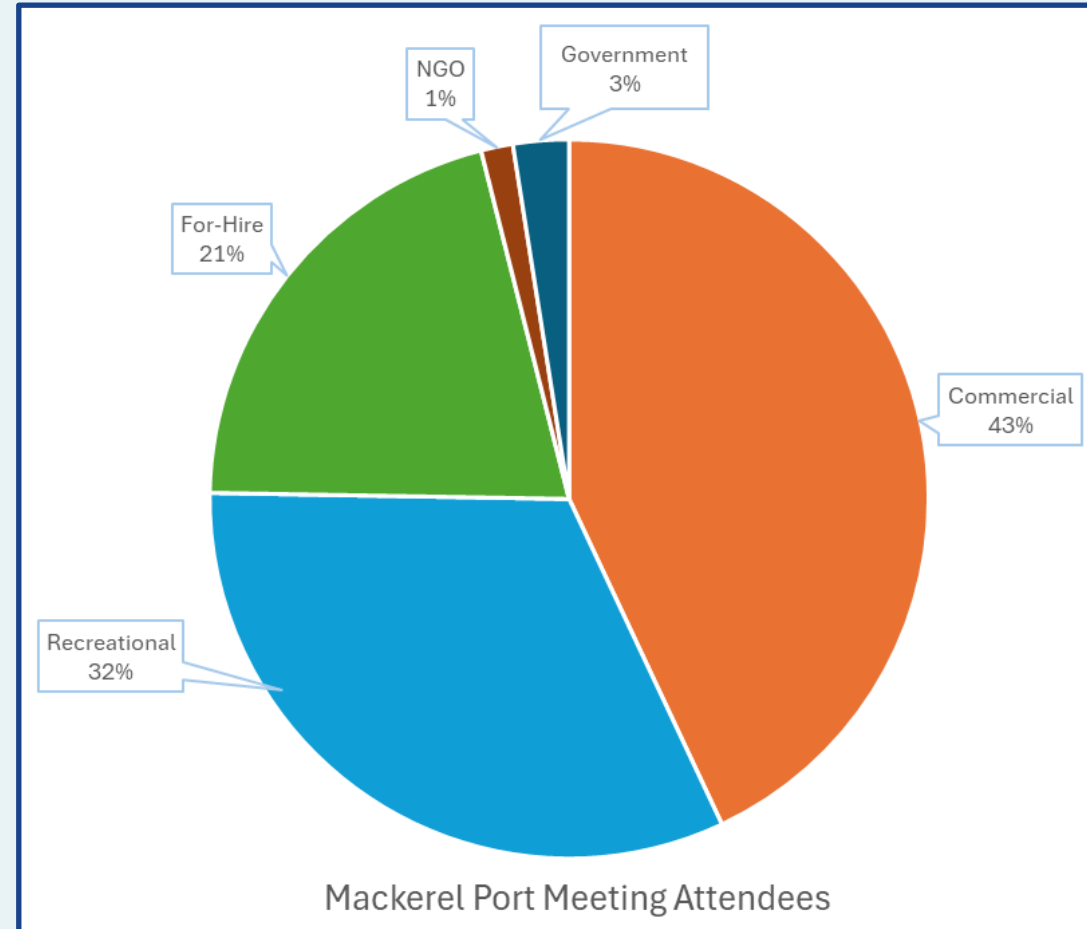
16 In-Person Meetings

6 Webinar Meetings

263 Stakeholders

8 States Visited

160+ Pages of Notes



What we learned in the Mid-Atlantic:

Environmental Conditions

The Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery is primarily a late summer and fall fishery in the Mid-Atlantic region with the specific arrival time being very dependent on water temperature.

Management Changes

The Northern Zone needs more commercial quota to support the Mid-Atlantic fishery.

A lower commercial trip limit for Atlantic Spanish mackerel is preferable to shorter seasons

Fishing Dynamics

Atlantic Spanish mackerel is an incredibly important component of multi-species commercial fisheries in the Mid-Atlantic.

There is increasing interest in the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery from the for-hire and private recreational sectors.

Atlantic king mackerel are available in the Mid-Atlantic region, but the fishery remains opportunistic and sporadic.

What we learned in North Carolina:

Environmental Conditions

Atlantic Spanish mackerel stay in North Carolina longer in the fall and move farther north into the Mid-Atlantic region.

Development and use of the offshore environment, such as offshore wind farms and dredging activities, may be having a negative effect on the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries.

Management Changes

Allocations for Atlantic Spanish mackerel need to be revisited, including allocations between the commercial and recreational sector and commercial quota allocations between the Northern and Southern Zones.

Improvements to recreational data and accountability should be a priority for the South Atlantic Council.

No changes are needed to Atlantic king mackerel management (trip limits, bag limits, and size limits). There may be room for higher limits but neither sector is currently restricted.

Fishing Dynamics

Atlantic Spanish mackerel and Atlantic king mackerel are some of the most important fisheries for the commercial and for-hire industry in North Carolina.

Most of Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest occurs in state waters, while the majority of Atlantic King mackerel harvest occurs in state waters.

What we learned in South Carolina and Georgia:

Environmental Conditions

Fewer Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are seen due to warmer waters, especially inshore.

Management Changes

No changes to Atlantic king mackerel management or Atlantic Spanish mackerel management are recommended.

Fishing Dynamics

Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are opportunistic fisheries for fishermen in South Carolina and Georgia.

What we learned in Florida:

Environmental Conditions

When and where Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel can be found has changed substantially over the last five years.

Development and use of the coastal environment is having a negative effect on the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries, both in terms of water quality and overall fishery access.

Management Changes

There may need to be some modifications to commercial limits for Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel commercial trip limits.

Fishing Dynamics

Atlantic king mackerel is one of the few fisheries that is viable to get sufficient poundage across the docks and Atlantic Spanish mackerel is the only fishery that is available and still easy to enter.

The Atlantic king mackerel market is sensitive to the number of fish on the market, and it can be challenging to balance market needs with a trip limit high enough for the few good weather days.

What we learned in New England:

Environmental Conditions

Atlantic Spanish mackerel are becoming a more regular presence in the New England region, while Atlantic king mackerel remain sporadic.

Management Changes

There is not currently a need to manage Atlantic king mackerel or Atlantic Spanish mackerel in the New England region.

Fishing Dynamics

Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are not targeted by the for-hire industry, but they are an exciting bonus when caught.

What similarities can be seen along the Atlantic?

Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are healthy and robust fisheries. They are some of the only remaining fisheries in the South Atlantic that are accessible and allow fishermen to make a living. Commercial and recreational business rely heavily on these fisheries.

Participation in the commercial Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries is stable or decreasing. Participation in the private recreational sector of the fisheries is increasing.

Commercial and for-hire fishermen rely on the ability to catch a diverse set of species. Regulations that make this challenging hurt fishing business and fish stocks by concentrating effort.

Changes in catch and effort for Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are not driven by issues with the stocks but reflect challenges with the economy and weather.

Changes in Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel distribution are driven in large part by water temperatures.

Sharks have become a significant problem in the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery making harvest challenging and ruining the fishing experience.

Continued engagement with fishery participants is essential. There needs to be transparency in how data are collected for Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel and communication on South Atlantic Council management decisions.



What differences were most prevalent?

In the Mid-Atlantic and North Carolina, Atlantic Spanish mackerel is consistently available whereas in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida when and where the fish are available has changed in recent years.

Limited entry for the commercial Spanish mackerel permits and the Coastal Migratory Pelagics for-hire permit remains controversial. Fishermen in the Mid-Atlantic and North Carolina region did not express interest in limited access for the Spanish mackerel permits, whereas fishermen in Florida felt limited access was needed in the commercial Spanish mackerel fishery. There was support for limited entry for the Coastal Migratory Pelagics for-hire permit but also concern that it would result in problems like those for currently limited access commercial permits.

The Atlantic king mackerel fishery remains important in North Carolina and Florida but is less important in South Carolina, Georgia, and the Mid-Atlantic region.

Opinions on the sale of Atlantic king mackerel caught during state-permitted tournaments were split between sectors. Commercial fishermen expressed concern about flooding of the market during tournaments (and pre-fishing), illegal behaviors, and poorly handled fish. Recreational fishermen discussed the importance of tournaments to communities in terms of the sale of fish supporting local charities and in introducing community members to a family fishery.



Questions?

Thank you to everyone who helped make the Mackerel Port Meetings effort a success! Including South Atlantic, Gulf, Mid-Atlantic, and New England Council members and staff, state agency staff from Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, and Atlantic States Commission staff.

Next: Where can the Council go from here?

Where can the Council go from here?

- These items need to be completed:
 - Updates to the Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMP Goals and Objectives.
 - Updating the Atlantic Spanish mackerel catch levels to reflect the most recent stock assessment and SSC recommendations.
- These items are optional:
 - Updates to management measures based on input received during port meetings.
 - Presentation from Gulf Council staff on the results of their CMP stakeholder engagement effort.



Amendment Development Options

Option One: A single amendment

- The Council could begin work on one plan amendment, in collaboration with the Gulf Council to:
 - Update the CMP FMP Goals and Objectives
 - Update Atlantic Spanish mackerel catch levels.
 - Revise management for Atlantic king and Atlantic Spanish mackerel based on input from port meetings.

Option Two: Two amendments

- The Council could restart work on CMP Framework Amendment 13 and begin work on a plan amendment, in collaboration with the Gulf.
 - Framework Amendment 13: Update Atlantic Spanish mackerel.
 - Plan Amendment: update the CMP FMP Goals and Objectives and revise management for Atlantic king and Atlantic Spanish mackerel based on input from port meetings.

COMMITTEE ACTION: DETERMINE HOW TO PROCEED WITH DEVELOPMENT OF MANAGEMENT ACTIONS FOR KING AND SPANISH MACKEREL.

Amendment Topics

- Sector allocations for Spanish mackerel.
- Commercial zones for Spanish mackerel.
- Regional commercial allocations for Spanish mackerel.
- Accountability measures for Spanish Mackerel
- Recreational bag limit and size limit for Spanish mackerel.
- Commercial trip limits for Spanish mackerel and king mackerel.
- Sale of tournament caught king and Spanish mackerel.
- Limited-entry for the commercial Spanish mackerel permit.
- *Limited-entry for the CMP for-hire permit.*
- *Recreational permitting and reporting for CMP species.*

COMMITTEE ACTION: DETERMINE WHICH TOPICS YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION ON IN JUNE.

Coming to the Council in June 2025

1. Input from the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel on the Port Meetings report and possible amendment topics.
2. Summaries of information provided during port meetings on each identified amendment topic and possible action/alternative options.
3. Refresher on catch level recommendations from the SSC based on SEDAR 78.
4. Presentation from the Gulf Council on their stakeholder engagement effort?