

Recent Spanish Mackerel Events

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

October 2022 – Mackerel Cobia AP



Pre-Stock Assessment (2019)

- **Commercial closures and public comment:** The Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel (AP) and members of the public expressed concern about increased participation in the commercial Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery and how this increase may affect Spanish mackerel in the long term. Of particular concern to stakeholders were recent closures to commercial Spanish mackerel harvest in federal waters off the northern zone (New York/Connecticut/Rhode Island line to the North Carolina/South Carolina line). During the 2017/2018 season, 100,000 pounds of quota was transferred from the southern zone (NC/SC line to the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line, Florida) to the northern zone to prevent an early closure. However, the northern zone quota was still projected to be met and federal waters were closed to commercial harvest of Spanish mackerel on November 7, 2017. The southern zone did not close but harvested 96.6% its remaining quota (SERO ALS).
 - During the 2018/2019 season there was no transfer of quota between the two zones. The northern zone was closed to commercial harvest on November 4, 2018, and the southern zone was closed to commercial harvest on February 5, 2019.
 - During the 2019/2020 season there was no transfer of quota between the two zones. The northern zone was closed to commercial harvest on August 24, 2019.

- **Council requests input from the Mackerel Cobia AP:** During their April 2019 meeting the Mackerel Cobia AP recommended that the Council consider ways to manage effort in the commercial Spanish mackerel fishery including a limited entry permit, a gillnet endorsement with qualifying criteria for the southern zone and working with state management agencies

- **Council sets a control date for commercial Spanish mackerel permits:** At their June 2019 meeting, the Council approved a motion requesting that a control date be established for the open access commercial Spanish mackerel permit as of March 7, 2019, the date at which the Council first discussed limited access for the commercial Spanish mackerel fishery.

- **Council starts work on CMP Framework Amendment 9:** Based on the Mackerel Cobia APs input, the Council requested a white paper on effort in the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery. Upon review of the white paper, the Council passed a motion to begin development of CMP Framework Amendment 9 to modify accountability measures for commercial Spanish mackerel and commercial trip limits in the Northern Zone.

- **Mackerel Cobia AP makes additional recommendations:** In October 2019 the Mackerel Cobia AP had an in-depth discussion of Atlantic Spanish mackerel. AP members discussed the importance of fishery to both the commercial and the recreational sectors. For the commercial sector, access to Atlantic Spanish mackerel at a time when they are available and profitable to harvest is incredibly important. For the recreational sector, high abundance is key as it ensures that encounter rates remain high and fish are available for a longer period of time, which is especially important during peak fishing season. AP members

also expressed frustration with the current commercial allocation (55% commercial, 45% recreational), a desire to see modifications to the northern zone trip limit system, and consideration of limited entry for the commercial fishery and gillnet component in Florida.

- **Council modifies CMP Framework Amendment 9:** At the December 2019 Council meeting, Robert Beal, Executive Director of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), clarified that the ASMFC Interstate Fisheries Management Plan for Spanish Mackerel does not require states to close their waters to commercial harvest of Spanish mackerel when a federal closure occurs. Based on the information provided, the Committee determined that it was no longer necessary to immediately address Spanish mackerel accountability measures, but that a trip limit reduction in the Northern Zone would help to extend the commercial Spanish mackerel season in federal waters.

COVID-19 and SEDAR Planning (2020)

- **Council stops work on CMP Framework Amendment 9:** In March 2020, the Council noted that the analysis of proposed trip limits would only extend the commercial Spanish mackerel season in the Northern Zone by two to five days. As a result, the Council chose to halt development of CMP Framework Amendment 9 and review management of Spanish mackerel after the completion of the stock assessment. The Spanish mackerel operational stock assessment (SEDAR 78) was in the planning stage and scheduled to begin in 2021.
- **Council asks Center to prioritize the Atlantic Spanish mackerel:** The Council and ASMFC cooperators disagreed with the Southeast Fisheries Science Center's (SEFSC) recommendation to delay the Spanish mackerel assessment. The Center agreed to begin discussions with the states to determine if they could help with the processing of age samples and provide the SAFMC with a report of the status of the Spanish mackerel ageing work within a month. It was recognized that if the Spanish Mackerel assessment were to remain in on the schedule for 2021, other assessment schedule changes would be needed.
Note: Spanish mackerel was originally scheduled to be a standard assessment beginning in 2019. However, the assessment was pushed to 2020 in order to accommodate other Council priorities at the time. The assessment was then further delayed due to the 2019 government shutdown and MRIP data concerns raised by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC).
- **Commercial Atlantic Spanish mackerel closures:** During the 2020/2021 season there was no transfer of quota between the two zones. The northern zone was closed to commercial harvest on July 22, 2020, and the southern zone was closed to commercial harvest on February 3, 2021.

SEDAR 78 Begins (2021)

- **NOAA Fisheries staff requests the Council consider modification of trip limit step downs:** The commercial trip limit system for Atlantic Spanish mackerel in the Southern Zone (NC/SC line south to the Miami-Dade/Monroe line in Florida) uses an adjusted quota system with several step downs (3,500-pounds at the beginning of the season, dropping to 1,500-pounds when 75% of the adjusted quota has been met, 500-pounds when 100% of the adjusted quota has been met, closure once the full quota has been met). Rick DeVictor, SERO, explained to the Council that due to late reporting and associated issues with projections from the SEFSC there was a need to close the fishery to commercial harvest immediately, skipping the usual trip limit step downs for the 2020/2021 season. The Committee noted the intent to take a

comprehensive look at the Spanish mackerel fishery once results from the upcoming stock assessment for Spanish mackerel were available and that this issue could be addressed at that time.

- Work on SEDAR 78 begins in the spring:** Data scoping webinar in May 2021, working papers submitted in October 2021, first data review and assessment webinar in November 2021.
- Commercial Atlantic Spanish mackerel closures:** During the 2021/2022 season there was no transfer of quota between the two zones. The northern zone was closed to commercial harvest on June 28, 2021, and the southern zone was closed to commercial harvest on January 21, 2022.

SEDAR 78 Concludes (2022)

- Work on SEDAR 78 concludes:** Assessment webinars held from January through March 2022. Completed assessment delayed due to final data delivery timeline. Final assessment reviewed and made available on May 13, 2022 (note: edits were made to the original version submitted and a revised version was made available in July 2020).
- Assessment presented to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC):** The SSC reviewed SEDAR 78 at their August 4, 2022, meeting and indicated that more work would need to be done before they felt the assessment could be considered the best scientific information available.
- Assessment and SSC recommendations presented to the Council:** The Council requested that the SEFSC rerun the SEDAR 78 assessment model with new landings to address uncertainty with MRIP estimate in the terminal year. The SSC will review the changes at their upcoming October 2022 meeting and determine whether the changes were sufficient to address their cited concerns or if additional changes are needed. If additional changes are substantial, a research track assessment would be needed for Atlantic Spanish mackerel. Additionally, given continuing closures in the commercial sector, the Council directed staff to proceed with application of allocation decision tool to the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery for both sector and regional allocations to be discussed at the December 2022 meeting.
- Commercial Atlantic Spanish mackerel closures:** During the current 2022/2023 season there was no transfer of quota between the two zones. The northern zone was closed to commercial harvest on June 21, 2022, and the southern zone remains open to harvest.