



PORT MEETINGS FOR THE ATLANTIC KING MACKEREL AND ATLANTIC SPANISH MACKEREL FISHERIES

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The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council manages recreational and commercial fisheries, including king and Spanish mackerel. At the urging of their Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel, the Council hosted a series of port meetings along the Atlantic coast throughout 2024. Port meetings attendees discussed their perspectives with other fishery participants and local Council members. This report provides summaries of those meetings as well as overall themes along the Atlantic coast.

These port meetings provided a unique opportunity for stakeholders in the Atlantic king and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries to share their insights and ultimately define the future for these changing fisheries.

Atlantic King Mackerel and Atlantic Spanish Mackerel are managed via the Fishery Management Plan for Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Region

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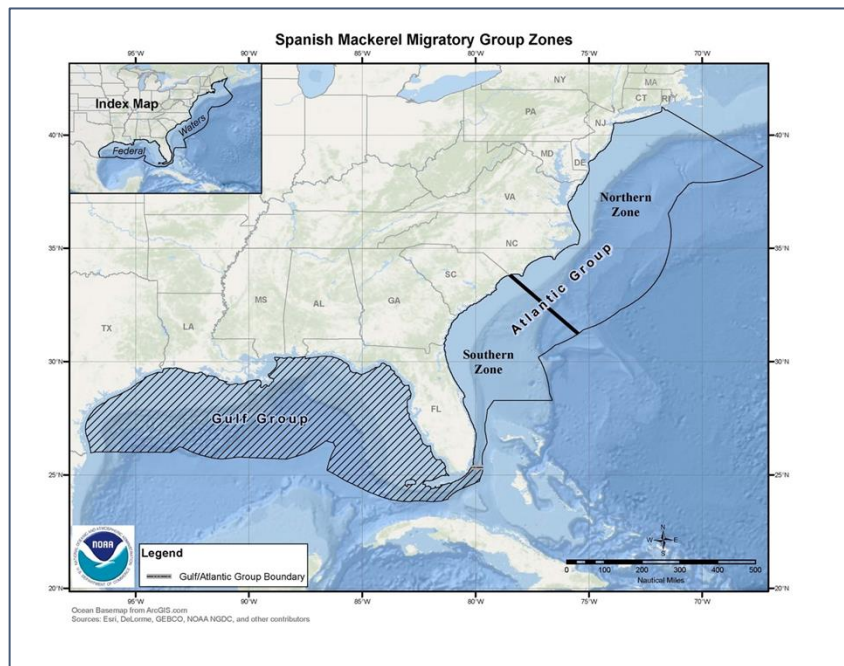
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Introduction

Management of King and Spanish Mackerel

The king mackerel and Spanish mackerel fisheries are jointly managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) via the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Coastal Migratory Pelagic (CMP) Resources in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Region (CMP FMP). The CMP FMP recognizes two migratory groups of king and Spanish mackerel: the Gulf migratory group and the Atlantic migratory group. The migratory groups are split year-round at the Miami-Dade/Monroe County, Florida boundary and each migratory group is primarily managed by the respective council. Atlantic migratory group king mackerel (Atlantic king mackerel) and Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel (Atlantic Spanish mackerel) are managed from the Miami-Dade/Monroe County, Florida boundary to the New York/Connecticut/Rhode Island boundary. The CMP FMP also includes management measures for Gulf migratory group Cobia (Gulf cobia). However, the Atlantic King Mackerel and Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Port Meetings (port meetings) did not directly address Gulf cobia. Information on recent management changes for Gulf cobia can be found in Amendment 32 to the CMP FMP.¹



Development of Mackerel Port Meetings

Over the past few years, both the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries have been undergoing substantial changes.² During their April 2019 and October 2022 meetings, the South Atlantic Council's Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel (AP) passed motions requesting the South Atlantic Council set up a series of in-person meetings to gather more information on the Atlantic king and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries. The South Atlantic Council acknowledged the importance of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the commercial and recreational king and Spanish mackerel fisheries and agreed that a series of in-person port meetings would provide information critical to management of the two fisheries. A plan for holding port meetings throughout the South Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic, and New England regions was developed throughout 2023 and implemented between April 2024 and January 2025.

¹https://gulfcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/CMP-Amendment-32-Final-Draft-COMLETE_508_02172022.pdf

² Fishery Performance Reports: <https://safmc-shinyapps.shinyapps.io/FPRAll/>

In addition to the South Atlantic Council’s effort, the Gulf Council gathered input from stakeholders on Gulf migratory group king mackerel, Gulf migratory group Spanish mackerel, and Gulf migratory group cobia. The Gulf Council’s effort utilized a hybrid approach, holding special sessions of its Coastal Migratory Pelagic and Reef Fish Advisory Panels; virtual public feedback workshops; and an online feedback tool. A summary of the input received is available on the Gulf Council’s website.³

Development of port meetings, including meeting structure, locations, and outreach initiatives was a collaborative effort with staff from the following agencies participating in the planning process: Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission), Gulf Council, North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Coastal Resources Division, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Goals and Objectives

At the beginning of the port meetings development, the South Atlantic Council discussed their overall goal for the port meetings. These discussions led to the development of seven port meeting objectives. The objectives, as follows, drove both the design of port meeting design and the discussion topics:



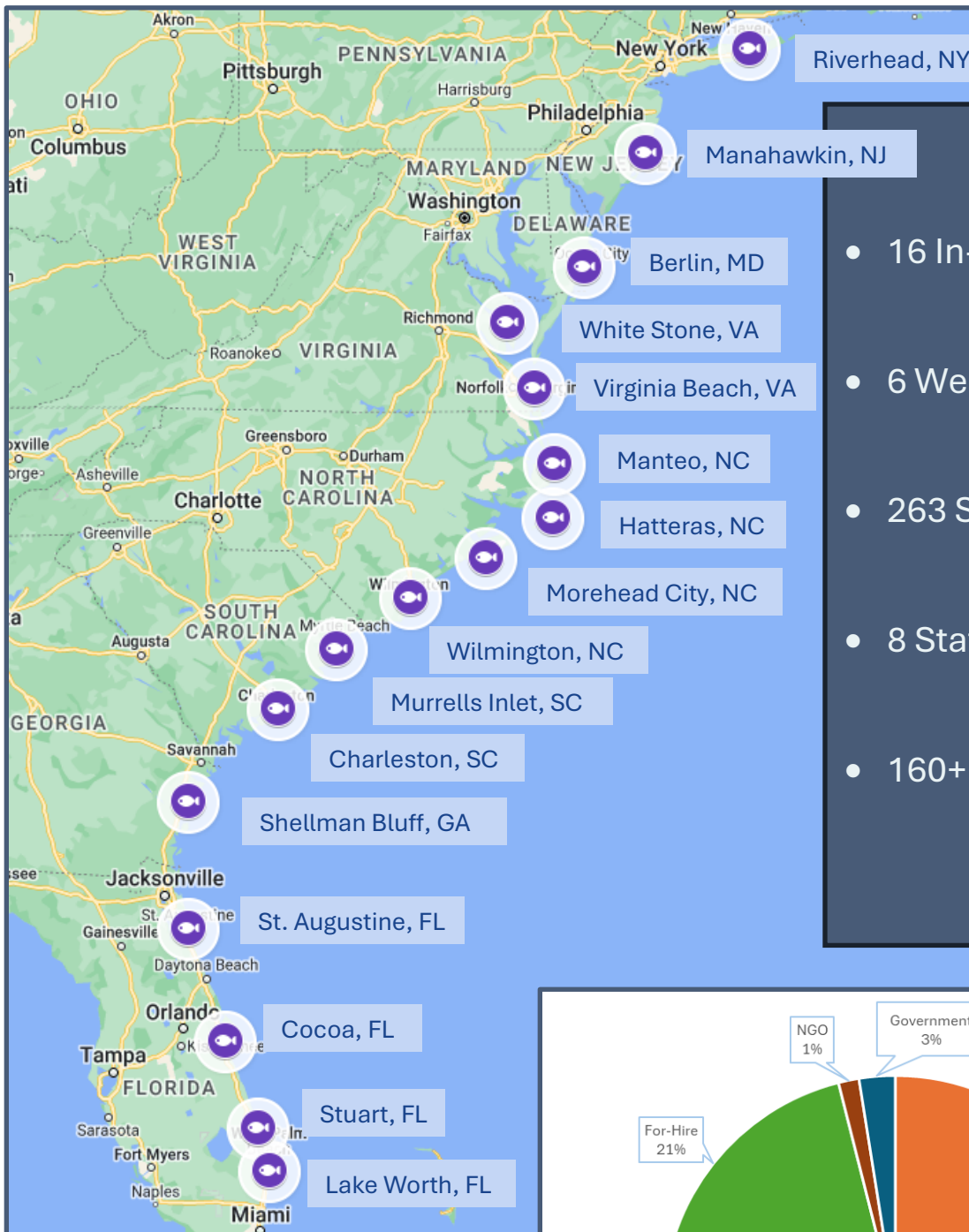
During port meetings, attendees were broken into smaller groups for discussion. Three broad topics were used to guide each group discussion. A list of questions, aimed at the specific goals and objectives, was provided to the staff or Council member facilitating each topic to help encourage discussion. However, conversation was ultimately allowed to flow naturally, allowing attendees to provide the information they felt was important for South Atlantic Council members to have when making decisions. The main discussion topics included:

- Management Changes (*Objective 1, Objective 4, and Objective 6*)
- Environmental Conditions (*Objective 3 and Objective 5*)
- Fishery Dynamics (*Objective 2 and Objective 7*)

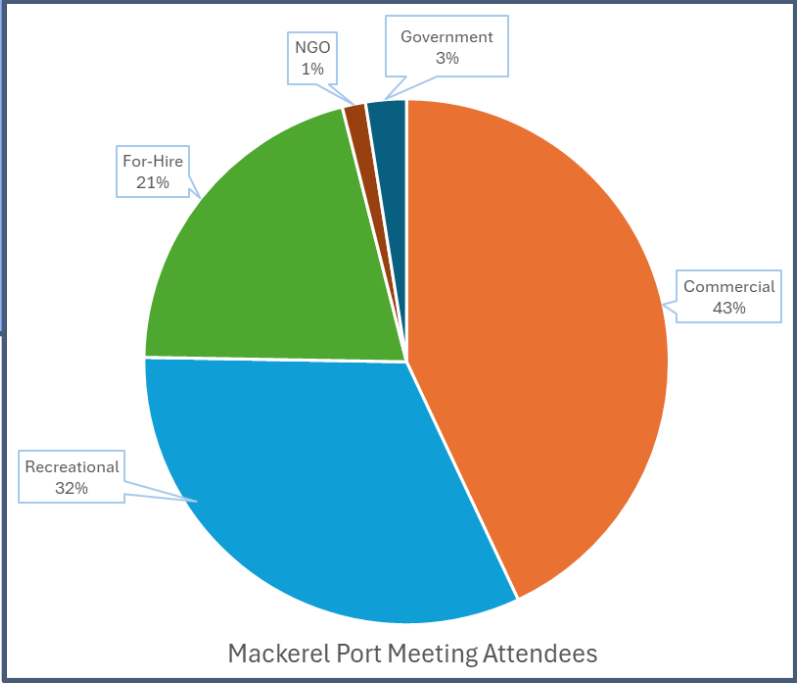
This report will summarize themes that emerged during each state or region’s specific port meeting with respect to each of the main discussion topics and seven objectives.

³ https://gulfcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/C-4-CMP-Special-Engagement-Summary_FINAL.pdf

Port Meetings by the Numbers



- 16 In-Person Meetings
- 6 Webinar Meetings
- 263 Stakeholders
- 8 States Visited
- 160+ Pages of Notes



Mid-Atlantic Region

Environmental Conditions

Theme 1: 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.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel has been available in the New Jersey area since the 1980s with a late summer/early fall run of fish that lasts approximately three weeks.
- In Maryland, giant schools of Atlantic Spanish mackerel can be seen 26-miles offshore in the late-summer into the fall.
- In Virginia, the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery moves quickly but the fish have been arriving earlier in the year than in past (now June or July). The water temperature needs to be around 68 degrees Fahrenheit minimum, but it is better when the water is warmer.

Management Changes

Theme 1: The Northern Zone needs more commercial quota to support the Mid-Atlantic fishery.

- Federal waters are closed to commercial Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest before the fish even arrive in the Mid-Atlantic region.
- North Carolina harvests fish first and often fills the Northern Zone quota, closing federal waters to commercial harvest and forcing fishermen in the Mid-Atlantic to fish in state waters and rely on state bycatch limits (where available).

Theme 2: A lower commercial trip limit for Atlantic Spanish mackerel is preferable to shorter seasons.

- Exact timing of the fishery can change from year to year depending on water temperature, so fishermen would rather have a lower commercial trip limit and a long season to ensure the fishery is open when fish arrive in their area.
- Commercial fishermen in the Mid-Atlantic region need to be able to harvest more than 500-pounds of Atlantic Spanish mackerel when the fish are available, but the current trip limit of 3,500-pounds per day is more than is needed. A weekly limit was suggested in White Stone, Virginia.
- Lower limits help to keep the market clear, but it is important for the South Atlantic Council to consider how lower trip limits affect discards.

Fishery Dynamics

Theme 1: Atlantic Spanish mackerel is an incredibly important component of multi-species commercial fisheries in the Mid-Atlantic.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel are an important component of a multi-species fishery. In the Mid-Atlantic, they are caught with butterfish, striped bass, flounder, sea trout, and bluefish.
- In White Stone, Virginia commercial fishermen are not just supplementing their income with Atlantic Spanish mackerel, but they are focusing on the fishery. Commercial businesses derive around 30% of their income, even some as high as 50%, of their income from the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery.

Theme 2: There is increasing interest in the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery from the for-hire and private recreational sectors.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel are an ideal target species for half-day trips because it is one of the few fish that can provide clients with a fight and meat. Half-day trips are becoming more popular as few clients want to go offshore due to price increases. Atlantic Spanish mackerel is keeping the charter industry alive because it is still reliable.

- In New Jersey, private recreational fishermen will troll for tuna and opportunistically harvest Atlantic Spanish mackerel in the summer months.

Theme 3: Atlantic king mackerel are available in the Mid-Atlantic region, but the fishery remains opportunistic and sporadic.

- Harvest of Atlantic king mackerel remains sporadic, only occurring when fishermen happen upon Atlantic king mackerel when targeting other species.
- In Virginia Beach, they used to see more Atlantic king mackerel in the 1980s and 1990s. The fish are still seen, but not typically targeted specifically.

North Carolina

Environmental Conditions

Theme 1: Atlantic Spanish mackerel are stay in North Carolina longer in the fall and moving farther north into the Mid-Atlantic region.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel are moving northward, being caught into the Chesapeake Bay.
- The increasing occurrences of Atlantic Spanish mackerel north of North Carolina are cutting into the already small commercial quota with a lot of pressure during the fall fishery.

Theme 2: 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.

- Poor water quality and pollution due to beach renourishment and dredging, especially in the Southern portion of North Carolina, are negatively affecting Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel, which tend to stay away from the beach when the water is polluted or turbid.
- Development of offshore wind is increasing off the coast of North Carolina and there is concern about noise pollution and magnetic fields having a negative effect on Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery.

Management Changes

Theme 1: 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.

- Federal waters off of North Carolina often close during the top fishing months due to the Northern Zone quota being met.
- The years used to allocate the commercial annual catch limit between the Northern and Southern Zones were years when harvest was lower in North Carolina due to fall hurricanes and is not an accurate representation of harvest capacity in the area.
- The entire Atlantic coast is fishing on the same biomass of fish, but the Southern Zone receives a significantly larger proportion of the commercial quota.
- There is concern that allocations between the commercial and recreational sector do not accurately affect the proportion of harvest between the two sectors.

Theme 2: Improvements to recreational data and accountability should be a priority for the South Atlantic Council.

- The private recreational sector is growing in size and yet does not have any reporting requirements. There should be mandatory logbooks for all fishing, including private recreational fishermen.
- The Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) does not provide sufficient or accurate information private recreational catch and effort.

Theme 3: 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.

- The three-fish per person Atlantic king mackerel bag limit and 24-inch minimum size limit are working well for fishermen in North Carolina.
- Effort in the Atlantic king mackerel fishery is driven by available time, cost of fuel, and water temperature, not regulations.

Fishery Dynamics

Theme 1: Atlantic Spanish mackerel and Atlantic king mackerel are some of the most important fisheries for the commercial and for-hire industry in North Carolina.

- As other fisheries become more restricted, commercial and recreational fishermen are moving into the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries. It is still easy to successfully make a trip targeting mackerel, especially when compared to the snapper grouper fishery.
- Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are the lifeblood of fish house is the Outer Banks of North Carolina.
- There has been a switch to using smaller boats in the for-hire industry and those vessels rely on Atlantic Spanish mackerel to run multiple trips a day. Atlantic Spanish mackerel are fun for clients to catch.

Theme 2: Majority of Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest occurs in state waters, while majority of Atlantic King mackerel harvest occurs in federal waters.

- Majority of Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest that occurs in state waters is using gill net gear in the northern portion of the state. Florida fishermen are able to catch their quota using cast nets in state waters, but this style of fishing would not work in North Carolina.
- In the southern portion of the state, there used to be a substantial net fishery for Atlantic Spanish mackerel, but strict regulations have decreased participation.
- While most Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest occurs in state waters, many fishermen hold a federal commercial Spanish mackerel permit in case they need to go into federal waters or in case limited entry is introduced in the future.
- The 1990s was the height of the Atlantic king mackerel fishery, but for-hire trips for Atlantic king mackerel have decreased over the last ten years as fewer people want to pay the cost of go offshore.

South Carolina and Georgia

Environmental Conditions

Theme 1: Fewer Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are seen due to warmer waters, especially inshore.

- In South Carolina, Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel are targeted in the fall when waters are cooler. In the summertime, Atlantic king mackerel tournament fishermen will head offshore for fish.
- In Georgia, warmer waters have results in fewer Atlantic Spanish mackerel and Atlantic king mackerel. Waters have remained at 85 degrees Fahrenheit, even offshore. Fishermen are having to waters deeper than 100-feet to target Atlantic king mackerel.

Management Changes

Theme 1: No changes to Atlantic king mackerel management or Atlantic Spanish mackerel management are recommended.

- Fishermen are not regularly catch three Atlantic king mackerel per person, so there is no need to change the recreational bag limit. There is no need to change the Atlantic Spanish mackerel bag limit (currently

15-fish per person) but reductions were needed, fishermen in South Carolina and Georgia would prefer a smaller bag limit and a longer season.

Fishery Dynamics

Theme 1: Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are opportunistic fisheries for fishermen in South Carolina and Georgia, not specifically targeted species.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel is not an important fishery for the for-hire sector in South Carolina because it is too unreliable. Atlantic king mackerel is not a consistent catch, but when available it is a day maker.
- In Georgia, Atlantic king mackerel used to be accessible and easy to catch, but sharks have lowered the trip satisfaction resulting in substantially less targeted effort.

Florida

Environmental Conditions

Theme 1: When and where Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel can be found has changed substantially over the last five years.

- Cold water is what drives Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel south, but temperatures have been increasing with warmer winters.
- The location and timing for runs of Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel are no longer reliable. Fish are staying farther north in northern Florida and southern Georgia and larger fish are staying farther offshore. The fish are also staying more spread out instead of congregating together.
- There are mixed opinions on whether Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are expanding their range northward vs. moving their current range northward.
- Changes in the timing and location of fish has led to questions on whether fishermen are fishing on Atlantic king mackerel or Gulf king mackerel during certain portions of the year, especially in southern Florida near the known mixing zone.

Theme 2: 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.

- Dredging operations and beach renourishments are affecting the health of both the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries. These efforts pollute nearshore waters, and fish will avoid key fishing grounds.
- Space launches are increasing in frequency and preventing fishermen from accessing fishing grounds on the few good weather days that occur.
- Freshwater discharges, which have gotten worse in the last five years, and muddy waters will push Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel offshore moving fishermen into federal waters. Some fishermen do not realize that they need federal permits to target these species in federal waters.

Management Changes

Theme 1: There may need to be some modifications to commercial limits for Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel commercial trip limits.

- It is important that fishermen have a high enough trip limit for Atlantic king mackerel to make trips worthwhile when the weather is good, but large amounts of fish on the market can drop the price significantly. The current trip limit system works, but it does cause fluctuations in the market.
- Atlantic King mackerel should move back to a weight limit as opposed to the number of fish. It will be important to give fishermen some leeway with the exact weight onboard, such as a 5% overage limit.

- A larger trip limit should be considered for Atlantic Spanish mackerel. The current limit is per day, the Council could consider a per trip limit with multiple trips allowed per day or a larger daily limit. The current daily limit starts at 3,500 pounds, but it could be increased to 5,000 pounds per day or even 7,500 pounds per day. Alternatively, other fishermen felt that 3,500-pound trip limit was too high and that a year-round limit (as opposed to a step down) of 1,500 or 1,750 pounds would be more beneficial.
- There are concerns about equability of access to Atlantic Spanish mackerel between cast nets (operate in state waters) and gill nets (operate in federal waters) under the 500-pound bycatch limit in state waters under a federal waters closure. All landings count against the federal annual catch limit.

Fishery Dynamics

Theme 1: Atlantic king mackerel is one of the few fisheries that is 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.

- Fishermen have been targeting Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel for generations.
- The Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries see the largest runs of fish and are high volume fisheries where fishermen are able to catch more fish with less effort.
- In southern Florida charter fishermen will target Atlantic king mackerel when dolphinfish are unavailable.

Theme 2: 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.

- The price of Atlantic king mackerel has been high recently because fishermen are catching fewer fish. However, the economy and higher fuel prices demand higher prices.
- If the price of Atlantic king mackerel rises too high, it begins to compete with other forms of protein.
- Management cannot be based on trying to control the market because it is too variable and affected by fish from different locations, such as Gulf king mackerel harvest.

New England

Environmental Conditions

Theme 1: Atlantic Spanish mackerel are becoming a more regulation presence in the New England region, while Atlantic king mackerel remain sporadic.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery begins in the late summer, early fall (August) along with the false albacore and bonito fisheries.
- When the water is warmer and there is a good run of juvenile menhaden you might see some king mackerel in Cape Cod, Massachusetts.
- The Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel are primarily found in 35-feet of water or less and only in a few specific locations.

Management Changes

Theme 1: There is not currently a need to management Atlantic king mackerel or Atlantic Spanish mackerel in the New England region.

- There is not a desire for the New England area to have out of control harvest, but right now there is not enough effort to warrant any management.
- If Atlantic Spanish mackerel [or Atlantic king mackerel] were to become more consistent fisheries in the region management may be needed in the future. It would be important for the South Atlantic Council to

be proactive since there is often lag time between identification of an issue, management measures, and communication of management measures to anglers.

- Management measures should be driven by what is currently happening in the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic regions where harvest is more significant.

Fishery Dynamics

Theme 1: Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are not targeted by the for-hire industry, but they are an exciting bonus when caught.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel are not used to advertise for-hire trips, but when they are available captains will stop to fish for them because they are an exciting and exotic catch for clients.
- Most for-hire trips that encounter Atlantic Spanish mackerel are targeting hardtails (false albacore and bonito).
- Atlantic Spanish mackerel is more of an experience fish with for-hire clients not looking to harvest them, but they do represent an alternative meat fish for when other species (striped bass) are unavailable due to regulations.

Coastwide Themes and Differences

Similarities Along the Atlantic Coast

Theme 1: 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.

- Fishermen from all states along the Atlantic coast, but especially the Mid-Atlantic, North Carolina, and Florida, noted the importance of Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel to their overall fishing businesses. For commercial fishermen in the Mid-Atlantic Atlantic Spanish mackerel is a key component of a multispecies fishery that many participants are increasingly reliant on. In North Carolina and Florida, Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel represent one of the few remaining fisheries where it is still easy to make a trip.
- Similarly, the Atlantic king mackerel and especially Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries have become important for the for-hire component of the recreational sector. As some for-hire businesses move to smaller vessels and fewer offshore trips due to the economy, the mackerel fisheries represent a reliable catch for clients. Both species are good for clients looking for an exciting catch and those looking to take home dinner. Additionally, shorter trips that remain inshore are ideal for families and all businesses to run multiple trips in a day.

Theme 2: Participation in the commercial Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery is stable or decreasing. Participation in the private recreational sector of the fishery is increasing.

- States throughout the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic noted a stable or decreasing trend in the number of active commercial fishermen. While being experienced in both the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries for all gear types, it was noted specifically that the experimental gill net fishery for Atlantic Spanish mackerel remained small and the offshore gillnet fishery for Atlantic Spanish mackerel has decreased in recent years.
- Alternatively, the increase in recreational effort, specifically from the private recreational component, was noted in most states. More individuals are moving to the coast and participating in saltwater fisheries, including for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel. Improvements in technology have increased participation and the success of private recreational anglers.

Theme 3: 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.

- The ability to target, catch, and retain a diverse suite of species is something of paramount importance to commercial and for-hire businesses. This sentiment was expressed regardless of whether Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel were being harvested as part of a multispecies fishery or as standalone component of business targeting additional fisheries. Being able to bring in a diverse suite of species is better for business than catching and harvesting a large poundage of a single fish. It was also noted that restrictive regulations on a single species simply push fishing effort to another species, which is not good for the long-term health of fish stocks or fishing business.

Theme 4: Changes in catch and effort for Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are not driven by issues with the stocks but a reflection of challenges with the economy and weather.

- As noted above, Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are both considered to be robust and healthy fisheries. However, in recent years there have been fluctuations in landings in both the recreational and commercial sectors. Across the coast, fishermen felt it was important for scientists and managers to understand that fluctuations in landings were not reflective of issues with the Atlantic king mackerel or Atlantic Spanish mackerel stocks. These fluctuations in landings are being driven by other challenges facing the fisheries, including, but not limited to, lower commercial participation, decreases in the number of fishable days due to weather, and changes in the economy increasing prices across the board, but especially for fuel.

Theme 5: Changes in Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel distribution are driven in large part by water temperatures.

- While multiple environmental factors are known to affect where and when fish may show up in a given community, when asked about what environmental conditions were known to drive the presence or absence of Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel, water temperature was only factor noted at all of the individual port meetings. As the environment is changing, Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel are showing up in new areas and not showing up in areas where they were once reliable. It is still unclear whether this represents an expansion of their known range or a shift in their known range northward.

Theme 6: Sharks have become a significant problem in the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery making harvest challenging and ruining the fishing experience.

- Interaction with and depredation from sharks has become a significant challenge in the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries along the coast. It has become challenging if not impossible to land whole mackerel due to depredation and fishermen often have to move locations multiple times to try to avoid interactions. In Florida, dive boat tourism has exacerbated this problem and remains largely unregulated. In Georgia, it was reported that some fishermen now avoid targeting Atlantic king mackerel because interactions with sharks have ruined the fishing experience.

Theme 7: Continued engagement with fishery participants is essential. There needs to be transparency in how data is collected for Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel and communication on South Atlantic Council management decisions.

- Communication with fisheries stakeholders was a topic of discussion at multiple port meetings. In the Mid-Atlantic, fishermen felt that the South Atlantic Council needed to do a better job of engaging fishermen in the management process and communicating regulatory information to those newly participating in these fisheries. In all states, fishermen expressed the importance of continued engagement from the South Atlantic Council, especially in areas that the South Atlantic Council does not reach in-person regularly such as Hyde and Dare Counties in North Carolina.
- All fishermen felt that there needed to be more transparency in regard to the available data and the stock assessment process. The data used should be accessible to fishermen and the South Atlantic

Council should better utilize stakeholder input and highlight where that input has been used in the management process.

Differences Along the Atlantic Coast and Between Sectors

Theme 1: 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.

- Throughout the Mid-Atlantic region commercial and recreational fishermen report consistent runs of Atlantic Spanish mackerel, sometimes going back as far as the 1980s. While the exact timing of the fishery may vary slightly from year to year, Atlantic Spanish mackerel are reliably in the region beginning in mid to late summer and into early fall. In North Carolina, the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery has been consistently occurring in the summer into fall with some fishermen noting that it appears the fish are arriving earlier and staying in the area longer.
- Alternatively, in South Carolina and Georgia the fisheries are more sporadic and Atlantic king mackerel, in particular, appear to be remaining offshore in search of cooler water. In Florida, there have been changes in the time of year and locations where Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are found. These changes, as described in the Florida themes section, appear to be driven by changes in climate (waters remaining warm throughout the year) and environmental conditions such as water quality and coastal development activities.

Theme 2: The Atlantic king mackerel fisheries remains important in North Carolina and Florida but is less important in South Carolina, Georgia, and the Mid-Atlantic region.

- In the Mid-Atlantic region, the presence of Atlantic king mackerel remains too sporadic for a targeted fishery. Similarly, in South Carolina and Georgia king mackerel have moved too far offshore to be specifically targeted by recreational and commercial fishermen. However, when they are caught by commercial fishermen most have permits and will keep them for additional income. Furthermore, Atlantic king mackerel tournaments are still popular in the area.
- In North Carolina and Florida, the historical Atlantic king mackerel fisheries remain popular for both commercial and recreational fishermen. Communities along both coasts continue to rely on the fishery as part of their commercial fishing and for-hire businesses.

Theme 3: 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 seen for currently limited access commercial permits.

- In the Mid-Atlantic region, limited entry for the commercial Atlantic Spanish mackerel permit is undesirable because participation in the fishery is generally low or stable and there are concerns that a limited entry system would prevent younger fishermen from entering the fishery. Additionally, in states like New Jersey, some fishermen gave up their federal permit in order to continue fishing for Atlantic Spanish mackerel in state waters under a federal waters closure.
- In North Carolina, fishermen felt that limited entry for commercial Spanish mackerel was not necessary as the economy (cost of gas, bait, keeping up with regulations) would naturally keep the number of participants in the fishery at an appropriate level. Additionally, majority of Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest in North Carolina occurs in state waters, so a limited access federal permit would have little effect on overall participation.
- In Florida, there was support for a limited access commercial permit for Spanish mackerel. It is common for fishermen to jump into the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery when fishing is good due to the open access nature of the permit. In addition to or as an alternative to a limited entry commercial Spanish mackerel permit, an endorsement could be created for the gill net component of the Atlantic Spanish

mackerel fishery. There were also recommendations to consider an income requirement to receive a limited access permit and an apprenticeship program that still would allow new entrants into the fishery.

- Some fishermen were in support of limited entry for the coastal migratory pelagics for-hire permit while others were against limited entry. Some fishermen felt that it was inappropriate to keep adding fishery participants to the for-hire industry while simultaneously restricting the annual catch limits and trying to preserve the current bag limit. Additionally, it was suggested that limited entry would curtail illegal fishing behavior and improve compliance with current reporting requirements. Alternatively, some fishermen felt that limited entry was not needed because offshore charters are already showing a decreasing trend. It would also make it challenging for the younger generation to enter into the fishery. These opinions varied among individuals within each community.

Theme 4: 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 both in terms of the sale of fish supporting local charities but in introducing community members to a family fishery.

- There is concern about accounting for the sale of tournament caught Atlantic king mackerel, especially if allocations and quota become tight in the future. Fishermen felt that it was important to ensure that trip tickets accurately capture tournament catch. Information on the number of tournament sold fish needs to be more readily available to fishermen, including how many tournament caught fish are landed by vessels with a commercial king mackerel permit.
- Commercial fishermen expressed concerns about tournament removal of large Atlantic king mackerel which are an important part of the breeding stock. Additionally, many tournament caught fish are landed by vessels with a commercial king mackerel permit and Atlantic king mackerel that are caught during practice days are sold by commercially permitted vessels. This floods the commercial market causing prices to drop. Finally, there was concern that tournament caught fish are not being handled to HACCP standards. Histamine in poorly handled Atlantic king mackerel is dangerous and will reflect poorly on the commercial industry, hurting sales.
- Alternatively, recreational fishermen noted that Atlantic king mackerel tournaments are important to local communities and charities. They boost the economy with expenditures on fuel, food, hotels, and boat builders. Additionally, tournaments are how a lot of individuals get their start in the Atlantic king mackerel fishery. Finally, many local charities rely on tournament sales for donations.

Next Steps

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) national standard guidelines require fishery management councils to establish objectives in each FMP and propose management measures that will achieve the objectives. In establishing the objectives, the councils should balance the biological needs of the fish stock(s) with human need, reconcile both present and future costs and benefits, integrate both private and public interests, and provide for a comprehensive approach to addressing problems within the fishery. Also, 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 (1992) was the last amendment to list and modify the objectives for the CMP FMP. The South Atlantic Council intends to review and update the goals and objectives for the CMP FMP based on input received during the port meetings. Additionally, the South Atlantic Council intends to base future management decisions, in part, on information gathered during the port meetings process.