



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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

March 2025



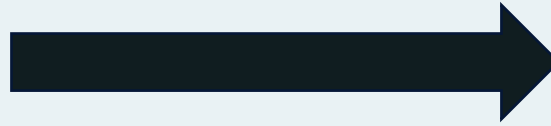
Goals and Objectives

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.



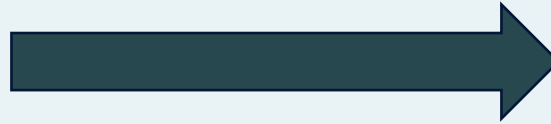
How to read the port meetings report:

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

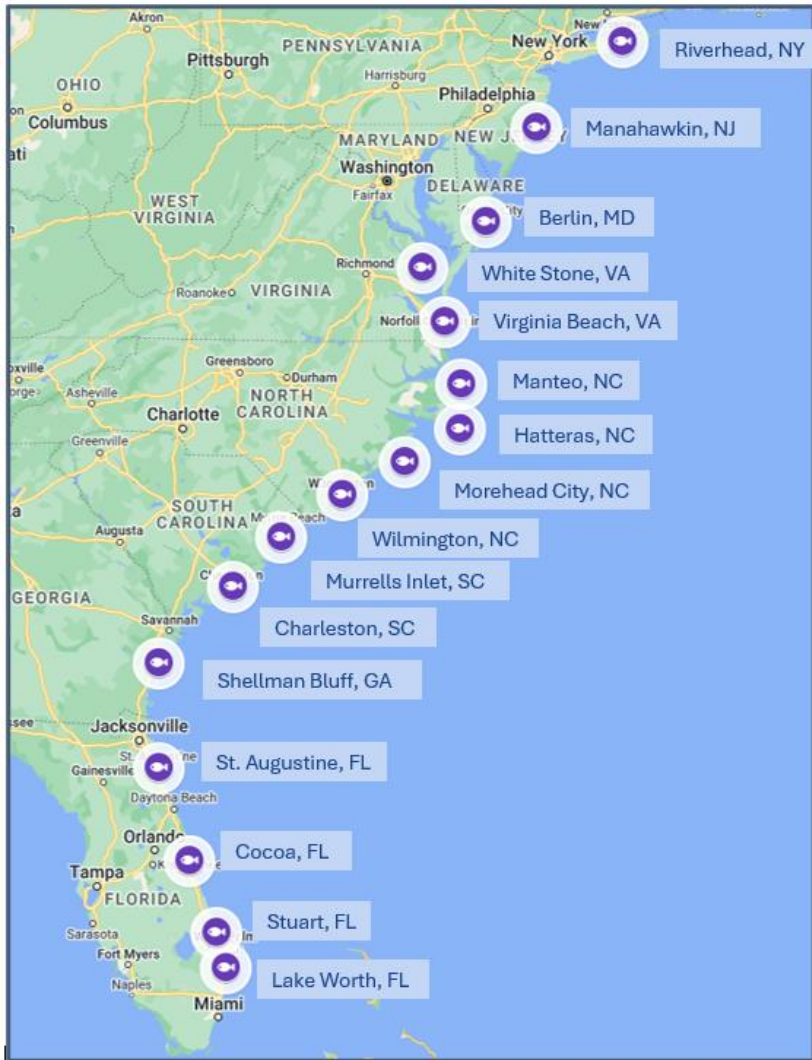
I'm interested in detailed information on king and Spanish mackerel in a specific community.



Mackerel Port Meetings
Final Report: **Appendix A**

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

Port Meetings By the Numbers:



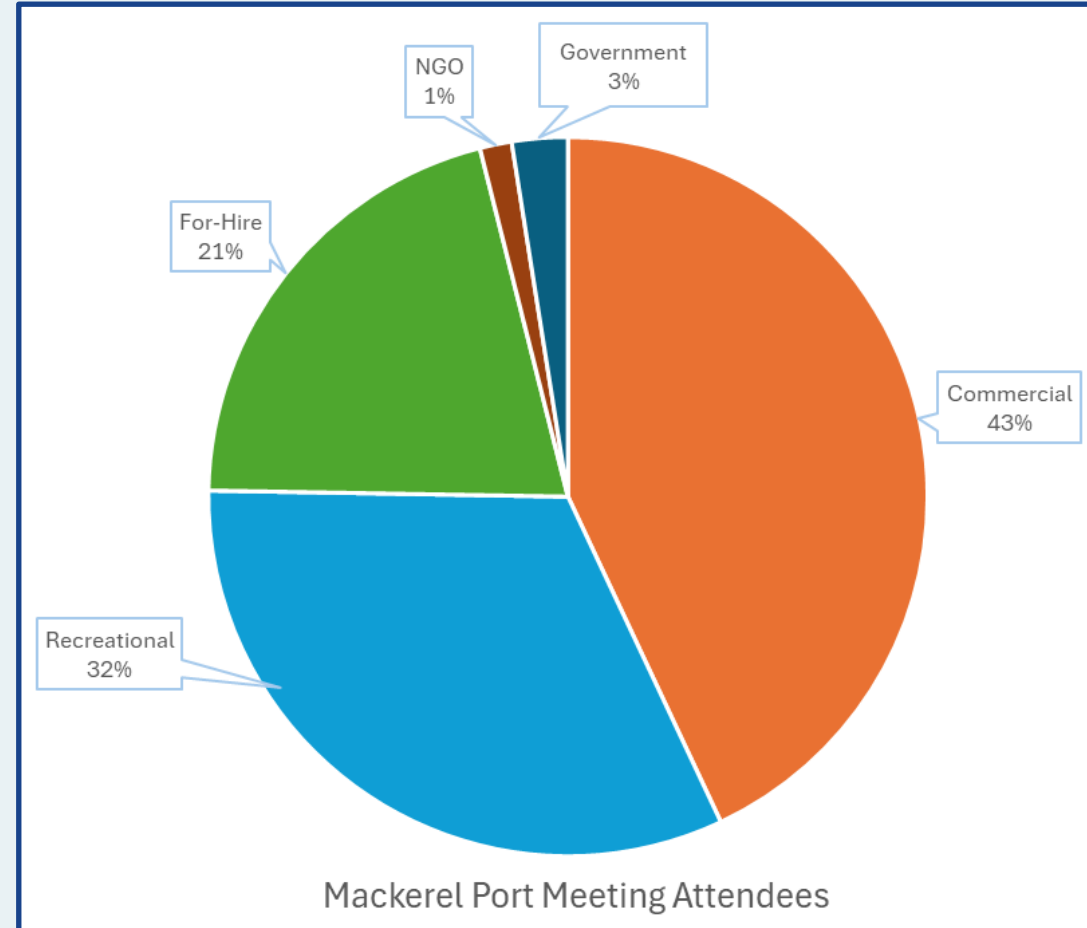
16 In-Person Meetings

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 are stay in North Carolina longer in the fall and moving 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.

Majority of Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest occurs in state waters, while majority of Atlantic King mackerel harvest occurs in federal 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, not specifically targeted species.

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 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 fishery is stable or decreasing. Participation in the private recreational sector of the fishery 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 a reflection of 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 is 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 seen for currently limited access commercial permits.

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.

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?

Possible 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.
- Limited-entry for the commercial Spanish mackerel permit.



Possible Amendment Topics



- Commercial trip limits for king mackerel.
- Sale of tournament caught king mackerel.

Possible Amendment Topics

- Recreational permitting and reporting for CMP species.
- *Limited-entry for the CMP for-hire permit.*



CMP FMP Goals and Objectives

★ Language updated by the SA Council and Gulf Council

★ Added by the SA and Gulf Council

★ Recommended for removal by the Gulf Council

★
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.

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 area.

To minimize gear and user grouper conflicts.

★
To distribute the total allowable catch of Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel between the 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.

To minimize waste and bycatch in the fishery.

★
To provide appropriate management to address specific migratory groups of king mackerel.

To optimize the social and economic benefits of the coastal migratory pelagics fisheries.

★
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.

SEDAR 78: Atlantic Spanish Mackerel

Current Catch Levels

Not Overfishing or undergoing overfishing.

Current ABC: 6,075,000 pounds

Commercial ACL: 3,330,000 pounds (55%)

Northern Zone: 662,670 pounds (20%)

Southern Zone: 2,667,330 pounds (80%)

Recreational ACL: 2,727,000 pounds (45%)

SEDAR 78 (2022)

Not Overfishing or undergoing overfishing.

Recommended ABC: 8,024,000 pounds

**SEDAR 78 included revised recreational landings based on the newer Fishing Effort Survey (FES) method. As such, the current acceptable biological catch level and the acceptable biological catch recommended by the SSC based on the SEDAR 78 are not directly comparable. The South Atlantic Council will consider implementation of the recommended ABC and possible management changes after port meetings.

Gulf Council CMP Stakeholder Engagement

The Gulf Council gathered input from a broad variety of stakeholders on king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia as a complementary effort to the South Atlantic Council's Port Meeting effort.

The Council gathered feedback from fishermen through:

- Special sessions held with advisory panels
- Virtual public feedback workshops
- An online feedback tool



Coming to the Council at their June 2025 meeting:

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