

THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Atlantic King Mackerel Fishery Performance Report

Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel

November 2026

Chair: Thomas Newman
Staff: Christina Curtis

What is a fishery performance report?

- Prepared by the Council's advisory panels, traditionally in advance of a stock assessment.
- Assembles information for AP members' experience and observations on the water and in the marketplace.
- Designed to complement scientific and landings data.
- Provided to the Scientific and Statistical Committee, the Social and Economic Panel, and the Council to inform their discussions.

The fishery overview and all previously developed fishery performance reports can be found on the Council's website.

CLICK HERE

Ask of the Advisory Panel

The AP is asked to review the previous fishery performance report for Atlantic king mackerel and determine whether the feedback is still applicable and to provide additional information to update the fishery performance report as needed.

Questions provided are intended to provoke thoughts about the current state and changes to the stock and fishery. Input is not limited to those questions as the intent is to incorporate all relevant observations that can assessment with assessing and developing management measures.



What did the last FPR say about Atlantic king mackerel?

The fishery was improving across the Atlantic region, with AP members reporting large catches and a broad range of fish sizes.

- North Carolina experienced more small fish inshore and larger fish farther offshore.
- Florida fishermen reported increased availability nearshore reefs around Jacksonville and St. Augustine and larger fish inshore in southern Florida during winter.
- Southern Florida fishermen reported numerous small fish offshore and released many fish during early summer.

Fishing Behavior and Catch Levels

- When/where are the fish available? Has this changed?
- Has the size of fish you are catching changed? If so, please describe the trend.
- Have there been effort shifts to/from king mackerel? If so, please describe, including the time frame for when these shifts occurred.
- Have there been considerable changes in fishing techniques and/or gears used to target king mackerel? If so, please describe, including the time frame for when these changes occurred.
- How much fishing for king mackerel typically occurs during the day versus at night? Has this changed?
- Do you actively avoid fishing for king mackerel in certain areas to avoid catching undersized fish or avoiding sharks to lessen fish loss?
- What do you see in terms of discards in the commercial sector? In the recreational sector?
  - How often are king mackerel discarded? What are the reasons they are discarded?
  - Do you encounter king mackerel as bycatch when fishing for other species? If so, what species are being targeted on these trips?
  - Do you think discard mortality is a significant factor for this species? Has this changed?

What did the last FPR say about Atlantic king mackerel?

- **The for-hire industry relies heavily on king mackerel in both Florida and North Carolina.** Their availability nearshore provides accessible fishing opportunities, attracts tourists, and helps operators offer shorter trips, including during periods when bottom fishing is challenging.
- **Tournament participation remains high** with shootout-style tournaments are becoming more popular.
- **Market prices varied by location and fishing activity**. In North Carolina majority of king mackerel was shipped away from the coast, and commercial fishermen and dealers reported relatively small price changes of $0.25–$0.50. In Florida, prices could fall to $1.80–$2.00 per pound during August when Gulf king mackerel landings increased supply.

Social and Economic Influences

- For the commercial sector, how has price and demand for king mackerel changed?
  - Is there increased demand for a specific size of king mackerel (e.g. plate sized)?
- How has demand for charter/headboat trips targeting king mackerel changed?
- Among the species you target, how important are king mackerel to your overall business (charter or commercial)?
- What communities are dependent on the king mackerel fishery?
- Have changes in infrastructure (docks, marinas, fish houses) affected fishing opportunities for king mackerel?
- How have fishermen and communities adapted to changes in the king mackerel fishery?

What did the last FPR say about Atlantic king mackerel?

- **Advisory Panel members had differing views on the recreational bag limit.** Some supported increasing it by one fish, while others considered the existing limit sufficient. Members emphasized that the opportunity to encounter king mackerel is important to recreational fishermen, beyond the number of fish landed.

- **Commercial trip limits in the Southern Zone were identified as overly complicated and in need of revision.**
  - Commercial catch limits had not been reached in recent years, and market interactions with the Gulf king mackerel fishery were affecting prices for Atlantic king mackerel.

Management Measures

- Are there new management measures that the Council should consider or are there existing management measures (such as size limit, trip limit, bag limit, season, etc.) that should be changed?

- Are the current ACL and allocations appropriate for each sector?

What did the last FPR say about Atlantic king mackerel?

- **Shark depredation was a significant problem throughout the fishery,** reducing fishing success and prompting a shift from live-bait fishing toward trolling. This change also increased conflicts among fishermen trolling in the same areas.
- **Water quality and temperature influenced king mackerel availability**. Fish leave areas quickly when conditions become unfavorable, including when water quality deteriorates or bait becomes less available.
  - Increased winds and temperatures dropping to around 70°F were associated with fish leaving the area.

Environmental, Ecological, and Habitat Concerns

- Do you perceive that the abundance of king mackerel has changed over the past ten years? If so, how has it changed?
- When/where are the fish available, and has this changed? For instance, has there been any shift in catch (annually/seasonally) inshore/offshore or north/south?
- Has the size of the fish that you typically encounter changed? If so, could you briefly describe the trend?
- Have you noticed any unique effects of environmental conditions on king mackerel? If so, please describe.
- What are your observations on the timing and length of the king mackerel spawning season in your area?
- What do you see now in terms of recruitment? Where are the small fish? Are large and small fish found in the same locations?
- Have you observed changes in catch depth or apparent bottom type fished on?
- How have sea conditions (monthly/seasonally) affected fishable days?
- Have you noticed any change in the species caught with king mackerel over the years or seasonally?

What else is important for the Council to know about king mackerel?

