

Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel

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THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Fishery Performance Report

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 Spanish 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 Spanish mackerel?

- **There have been changes in seasonal distribution**: In North Carolina, Spanish mackerel have been arriving earlier (early April rather than late May) and remaining later into the year, sometimes through mid-November. Catch is also increasing farther north, including Virginia and New York.

- **There has been high recruitment** with AP members seeing smaller fish observed in spawning condition more frequently. In Florida, warm conditions during 2019–2020 contributed to abundant concentrations of predominantly small fish in approximately 50 feet of water.

- **Florida fishermen reported shifts in where Spanish mackerel are found**, potentially related to predators such as sharks and porpoises and/or fishing pressure.

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 Spanish 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 Spanish mackerel typically occurs during the day versus at night? Has this changed?
- Do you actively avoid fishing for Spanish 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 Spanish mackerel discarded? What are the reasons they are discarded?
  - Do you encounter Spanish 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 Spanish mackerel?

- **Fishing effort is shifting geographically and by gear.** In North Carolina, restrictions and closures in other fisheries, including southern flounder, have encouraged some fishermen to change gear or move from sounds to ocean waters to target Spanish mackerel. Participation also extending farther north.
- **Price for Spanish mackerel varies by area.**
  - Due to federal closures and lower state water limits, fishermen in North Carolina pay more attention to fish quality and targeting larger fish that command better prices. $1.50 per pound (medium fish), smaller fish may be sold as marlin bait.
  - Florida prices have declined substantially with prices reportedly falling to approximately $0.50–$0.60 per pound, creating significant challenges for commercial fishermen.
- **Access to waterfront infrastructure is a growing concern.** Rising coastal development and property sales have contributed to shortages of dock space and the loss of historically available boat slips.

Social and Economic Influences

- For the commercial sector, how has price and demand for Spanish 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 Spanish mackerel changed?
- Among the species you target, how important are Spanish mackerel to your overall business (charter or commercial)?
- What communities are dependent on the Spanish mackerel fishery?
- Have changes in infrastructure (docks, marinas, fish houses) affected fishing opportunities for Spanish mackerel?
- How have fishermen and communities adapted to changes in the Spanish mackerel fishery?

What did the last FPR say about Atlantic Spanish mackerel?

- **Commercial quota allocations need to be reviewed.** Northern Zone commercial fishermen believe there is room for the fishery to grow and additional quota is needed to avoid closures.

- **The minimum size limit may need reevaluation** because undersized fish caught while trolling are often dead when discarded.

- **Limited access for Florida's commercial gillnet fishery should be considered** to address concerns about increasing participation, market disruption, and competition with inshore fisheries.

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 Spanish mackerel?

- **Warmer conditions are resulted in changes in seasonal availability.**
  - In North Carolina warm springs are often seen in connection with unusually early catches.
  - In Florida sustained warm weather is associated with abundant Spanish mackerel concentrations in approximately 50 feet of water with catches dominated by smaller fish.
- **Predators and environmental variability influence distribution.** Florida AP members suggested that sharks, porpoises, and fishing pressure could be contributing to changes in Spanish mackerel distribution.

Environmental, Ecological, and Habitat Concerns

- Do you perceive that the abundance of Spanish 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 Spanish mackerel? If so, please describe.
- What are your observations on the timing and length of the Spanish 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 Spanish mackerel over the years or seasonally?

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

