



# SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Trish Murphey, Chair | Jessica McCawley, Vice Chair  
John Carmichael, Executive Director

## AGENDA

### **Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel Meeting**

Crowne Plaza Hotel Charleston  
4831 Tanger Outlet Blvd.  
North Charleston, SC 29418

#### **Monday, March 31, 2025 – 1:30 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.**

Welcome and Introductions

Approval of Agenda – Stephen Donalson

Approval of November 2024 Meeting Minutes – Stephen Donalson

Public Comment

Report from the Council's Mackerel Cobia Committee Chair – Tom Roller

1. Update on Active Council Amendments (*Attachment 1*) – Christina Wiegand (1:30pm – 2:00pm)
2. Mackerel Port Meetings Draft Report (*Attachments 2a-2c*) (2:00pm – 4:00pm)
  - a. Overview – Christina Wiegand
  - b. Discuss and provide recommendations, as appropriate – Stephen Donalson
3. Giant Manta Ray Interactions with the Cobia Fishery (*Attachment 3*) (4:00pm – 5:00pm)
  - a. Overview – Jennifer Lee, SERO PRD
  - b. Discuss and provide recommendations, as appropriate – Stephen Donalson

#### **Tuesday, April 1, 2025 – 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.**

4. For-Hire Reporting Improvement Amendment (*Attachment 4*) (9:00am – 10:00am)
  - a. Overview – SAFMC Staff
  - b. Discuss and provide recommendations, as appropriate – Stephen Donalson
5. Citizen Science Update (*Attachment 5*) (10:00am – 11:00am)
  - a. Overview – Julia Byrd
  - b. Discuss and provide recommendations, as appropriate – Stephen Donalson
6. Research and Monitoring Prioritization Plan (*Attachment 6*) (11:00am – 12:00pm)
  - a. Overview – Dr. Chip Collier
  - b. Discuss and provide recommendations, as appropriate – Stephen Donalson

7. *Lines of Communication* Practice Run and Input (**Attachment 7**) (1:30pm – 5:00pm)
  - a. Overview – SAFMC Staff
  - b. Discuss and provide recommendations, as appropriate – Stephen Donalson
8. Election of new Chair and Vice-Chair for the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel

Other Business

Public Comment

Adjourn

**Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel Members**

Stephen Donalson, Vice-Chair

Kevin Aman

Tony Benevento

Stanford Carter

Charles Griffin

Alana Harrison

William Jones

Melissa Leone

*Charles Locke*

John Mallette

Thomas Newman

Butch Olsen

Michael Oppengaard

Jot Owens

*William Palmer*

Steve Saunders

Robbie Waddick

*Bill Weeks*

Benjamin Shepherd, Mid-Atlantic Liaison

Chris Ludford, Mid-Atlantic Liaison

**Staff:** Christina Wiegand

**Attachments**

**Attachment 1:** Action Amendments Document

**Attachment 2a:** Mackerel Port Meetings Draft Report

**Attachment 2b:** Mackerel Port Meetings Draft Report: Appendix A

**Attachment 2c:** Mackerel Port Meetings Presentation

**Attachment 3:** Giant Manta Ray Overview Presentation

**Attachment 4:** For-Hire Reporting Improvement Amendment Presentation

**Attachment 5:** Citizen Science Update Presentation

**Attachment 6:** Draft Research and Monitoring Prioritization (*available in recent documents*)

**Attachment 7:** *Lines of Communication* Presentation

# OVERVIEW

## Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel Meeting

The Committee will approve minutes from the November 2023 meeting and the agenda.

**1. Update on Action Council Amendments (*Attachment 1*)**

**Discussion:** Staff will provide an update on active amendments relevant to the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan.

**Advisory Panel Action:** None.

**2. Mackerel Port Meetings Report (*Attachment 2a-2c*)**

**Discussion:** In 2024, at the urging of their Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel, the Council hosted a series of 16 in-person and six virtual port meetings along the Atlantic coast. Port meeting attendees discussed their perspectives with other fishery participants and local Council members. Council staff will review the draft report from this effort and update the AP on recent Council discussions related to potential management actions.

**Advisory Panel Action:** Discuss and provide input on identified themes and items for consideration in future amendments.

**3. Giant Manta Ray Interactions with the Cobia Fishery (*Attachment 3*)**

**Discussion:** The east coast of central and northern Florida serves as an important reproductive habitat for giant manta rays. Recreational anglers in this region target cobia by seeking out giant manta rays that cobia often follow, casting at or near them. This activity may result in entanglement or injury to giant manta rays. SERO Protected Resources Division staff will provide information on recently published research and possible Endangered Species Act considerations.

**Advisory Panel Action:** Discuss and provide input, as appropriate.

**4. For-Hire Reporting Improvement Amendment (*Attachment 4*)**

**Discussion:** At their June 2024 meeting, the Council received feedback from the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office and Southeast Fisheries Science Center that data being collected through the SEFHIER program and for-hire logbook cannot be used for management due to low compliance and lack of validation. The letter included a list of recommendations to render the data collected through SEFHIER useful for management. The Council directed staff to initiate work on an amendment to address these shortcomings, including discussion of actions that can be taken in the near-term without an amendment, and consideration actions and alternatives being explored by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. Council staff will present an update on amendment development to date.

**Advisory Panel Action:** Discuss and provide input, as appropriate.

**5. Citizen Science Program Update (*Attachment 5*)**

**Discussion:** Council staff will provide information on Citizen Science Program activities. Updates will be given on the Citizen Science Program advisory groups, the Citizen Science Program's Project Idea Portal, Program evaluation, FISHstory, SAFMC Release, and the SMILE project.

**Advisory Panel Action:** Discuss and provide input, as appropriate.

**6. Draft Research and Monitoring Prioritization Plan (*Attachment 6*)**

**Discussion:** SEDAR stock assessments include research recommendations that can improve future assessments. Council staff has compiled short-term and long-term research needs derived from recently completed assessments, upcoming assessments, and management and monitoring programs, such as the recent Mackerel Port Meetings effort. Staff will present the Draft South Atlantic Research and Monitoring Prioritization Plan for 2026-2031. This draft will be reviewed by the Council at their June 2025 meeting.

**Advisory Panel Action:** Discuss and provide input, as appropriate.

**7. *Lines of Communication Practice Run and Input (Attachment 7)***

**Discussion:** Stakeholder input has always been a fundamental component of the council system. To better ensure stakeholders concerns are heard and addressed, Council staff has begun work to develop a plan for holding stakeholder engagement meetings along the South Atlantic coast, meeting fishermen in their communities. These meetings, now called Lines of Communication: Conversations with the Council, will provide an opportunity for Council members to have productive dialogues with fisheries participants. By engaging stakeholders in this more informal setting, Council members will be able to build or improve relationships and increase engagement in the management process. Building and maintaining relationships and momentum for participation in the management. A practice run of the *Lines* meetings will be held with the AP to get input from fisheries participants on the effectiveness of the meeting design.

**Advisory Panel Action:** Provide input on the effectiveness of the draft meeting design.