

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
MACKEREL COBIA COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Jekyll Island, Georgia
March 8-9, 2023

The Committee approved minutes from the December 2022 meeting and the agenda.

Update on amendments recently submitted to NMFS

At the March 2022 meeting the Council approved CMP Amendment 34 (Atlantic king mackerel catch levels and management measures) for formal review. The document was transmitted to NMFS on August 5, 2022. The request for comments posted on January 30, 2023 with comments due by March 31, 2023.

Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Management

At their December 2022 meeting, the Council expressed their frustration with the Atlantic Spanish mackerel assessment (SEDAR 78) and the importance of having accurate catch level recommendations to move forward with needed management discussions. To that end, the Council passed a motion directing the SSC to provide catch level recommendations for Atlantic Spanish mackerel at their April 2023 meeting, either from the updated assessment or using a data-limited approach. SSC Chair Dr. Jeff Buckel updated the Council on the January 2023 SSC meeting including the terms of reference developed by the Spanish mackerel workgroup and discussion of alternative methods of setting ABCs.

The Committee also discussed a letter from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC), stating that the revisions to SEDAR 78 requested by the SSC in January are exploratory in nature and require extensive rework. As such, they cannot be accomplished in a timely fashion. The SEFSC recommended the SSC develop its ABC advice based on the assessment and supporting analyses completed to date.

The Council again expressed the importance of receiving catch level recommendations at their June 2023 meeting. Additionally, they acknowledged the importance of getting an Atlantic Spanish mackerel research track assessment on the SEDAR schedule. The Committee would like the research track assessment to occur during the same time block as the greater amberjack research track assessment but acknowledges that this may present workload challenges and should be discussed at the next SEDAR Steering Committee meeting.

The Committee requested that the SSC discuss the following related to Atlantic Spanish mackerel at the April 2023 meeting, in addition to providing catch level recommendations:

- The SEFSC letter noted the use of data-limited approaches such as DB-SRA or DCAC in place of the current age-structured assessment model would not be consistent with BSIA. Based on this feedback, what other approaches should be included in the South Atlantic ABC Control Rule?
- Should the Council prioritize the Atlantic Spanish mackerel research track assessment or the Greater Amberjack research track assessment?

Mackerel Port Meetings

Based on recommendations from the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel, in December 2022 the Council directed staff to begin work on a plan to conduct port meetings for king and Spanish mackerel to gain a comprehensive understanding of the fisheries to improve management efforts. Council staff presented a planning document for discussion and the Committee provided the following feedback:

The Committee would like to discuss the current objectives in the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan (CMP FMP) to develop key questions to ask stakeholders during port meetings. Following port meetings and development of a final report, the Council would discuss modifications needed and formally adopt revised objectives.

Port meetings should focus on the king and Spanish mackerel fisheries (Gulf and Atlantic). Other species (specifically Gulf cobia and little tunny) are likely to come up during discussions and staff should be prepared with information and a plan to facilitate those discussion in a way that would still provide the Council important information on those species but would not overshadow needed discussions on king and Spanish mackerel.

Port meetings will be open to all members of the public (commercial, for-hire, recreational, and others) interested in discussing the king and Spanish mackerel fisheries.

- To ensure high attendance, meetings should be held in the evening when it is easier for stakeholders to attend.
- Staff should discuss how virtual participation could be accommodated, including holding webinar meetings near the end of in-person port meetings.

As possible, port meetings should be conducted in key communities throughout the Gulf of Mexico and along the Atlantic up to the southern end of Massachusetts. As such, working with the Gulf of Mexico, Mid-Atlantic, and New England Fishery Management Councils, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and state agencies will be integral to the success of port meetings.

- Suggestion to provide brief updates to the Gulf Council and the Commission at their upcoming meetings and request time to discuss port meetings in more detail at their August meetings.

It will be important to ensure stakeholders understand the port meeting process and how the information they provide will be used/incorporated into future management discussions. Existing stakeholder driven projects (ex. Dolphin MSE) may provide helpful guidance.

The Committee feels the following information will be key in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the king and Spanish mackerel fisheries:

- How species movement/expansion may affect future management, especially how fishermen are responding to these changes and how the permit structure may influence their behavior.
- Dynamics of the commercial fleet, including the mobility of the fleet, market flexibility, and spatial seasonality.

- Differences in how commercial fishermen interact with the fishery (travel to different areas vs. only participate in one area).
- Differences in the size of fish being targeted at different times and in different areas.
- How the commercial and recreational sectors utilize and value the king and Spanish mackerel fishery.
 - Is there a big catch and release component to the king and Spanish mackerel fisheries.
- What role do king and Spanish mackerel fishing tournaments play in the fishery. How might these tournaments be affecting the fisheries.
 - Is there acceptance/interest within the recreational industry to move towards catch and release only tournaments.
- How water quality and harmful algal blooms affecting the king and Spanish mackerel fisheries.
- How king and Spanish mackerel fisheries interact with other important fisheries.
- What gears are currently being used in the fishery and how has this changed over time.

After port meetings have been conducted, staff should develop a final report that includes notes from all conducted port meetings and a thematic analysis identifying patterns and themes among the different port meetings.

Topics for the Spring Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel Meeting

The Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel (AP) is scheduled to meeting this spring for a half day webinar. The Committee approved the following topics for discussion:

- Mackerel Port Meetings
- Council Research Recommendations
- Space Center Operation Impacts

Note: the AP is also scheduled meet in-person this summer, after the June Council meeting, once results from the Spanish mackerel assessment are available.

Other Business

At their December 2022 meeting the Council requested NMFS provide information on king and Spanish mackerel tournament landings over the last ten years and how those landings were accounted for against the annual catch limit. The Committee discussed each state's process for permitting king and Spanish mackerel tournaments and tracking tournament fish that may be donated to a state or federal dealer who then donates the monetary value from the sale to a charitable organization.

The SEFSC is currently working on pulling tournaments landings over the last ten years. Additionally, the SEFSC noted that conversations related to tracking these tournament fish will occur at upcoming ACCSP technical committee meetings.

The Committee requested on update on these discussions at the June 2023 meeting and discussion of king and Spanish mackerel tournaments by the AP during their planned summer 2023 meeting.

Note: Council staff drafts the timing and task motion based on Committee action. If points require clarification, they will be added to the draft motion. The Committee should review this wording carefully to be sure it accurately reflects their intent prior to making the motion.

Timing and Task(s)

MOTION 1: ADOPT THE FOLLOWING TIMING AND TASKS:

1. Have the SSC provide catch level recommendations for Atlantic Spanish mackerel, discuss what approaches should be included in the South Atlantic ABC Control Rule, and weigh in on the prioritization of an Atlantic Spanish mackerel research track assessment.
2. Continue developing a plan for conducting port meetings along the Gulf and Atlantic coast, seeking input from the Gulf of Mexico, Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.
3. Convene a meeting of the Mackerel Cobia AP this spring to discuss mackerel port meetings, Council research recommendations, and Space Center operation impacts.
4. Work with the SEFSC and state agencies to provide the Council information on tournament landings, the number of tournaments by state, and tournament participation. Additionally, provide information on the historic rationale for allowing donation of tournament caught fish.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL