



PORT MEETINGS FOR THE ATLANTIC KING MACKEREL AND ATLANTIC SPANISH MACKEREL FISHERIES

DRAFT REPORT | MARCH 2025

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council manages recreational and commercial fisheries, including king and Spanish mackerel. At the urging of their Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel, the Council hosted a series of port meetings along the Atlantic coast throughout 2024. Port meetings attendees discussed their perspectives with other fishery participants and local Council members. This report provides summaries of those meetings as well as overall themes along the Atlantic coast.

These port meetings provided a unique opportunity for stakeholders in the Atlantic king and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries to share their insights and ultimately define the future for these changing fisheries.

Atlantic King Mackerel and Atlantic Spanish Mackerel are managed via the Fishery Management Plan for Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Region

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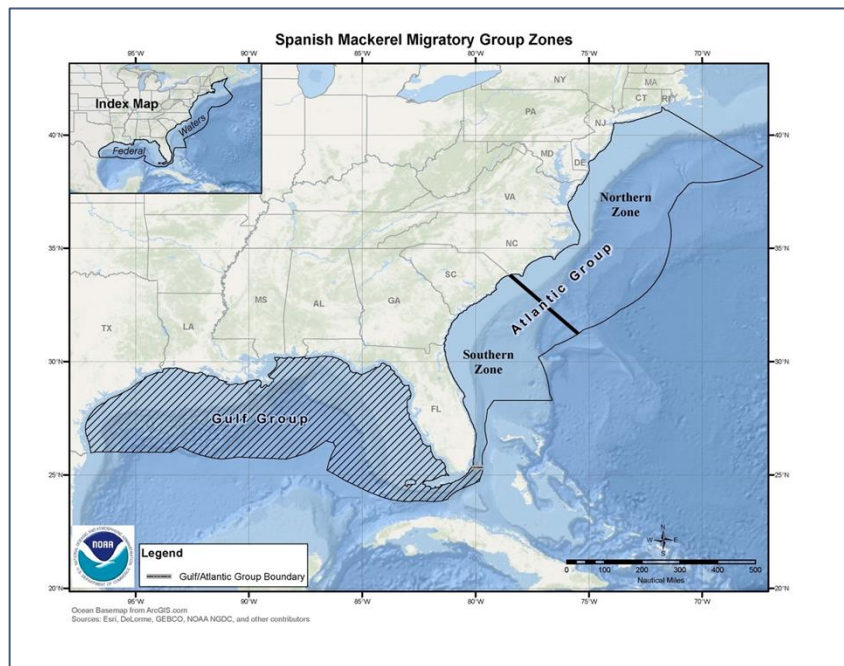
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Management of King and Spanish Mackerel	1
Development of Mackerel Port Meetings.....	1
Goals and Objectives.....	2
Port Meetings by the Numbers	3
Mid-Atlantic Region	4
North Carolina.....	5
South Carolina and Georgia	6
Florida	7
New England	8
Coastwide Themes and Differences	9
Next Steps.....	12

Introduction

Management of King and Spanish Mackerel

The king mackerel and Spanish mackerel fisheries are jointly managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) via the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Coastal Migratory Pelagic (CMP) Resources in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Region (CMP FMP). The CMP FMP recognizes two migratory groups of king and Spanish mackerel: the Gulf migratory group and the Atlantic migratory group. The migratory groups are split year-round at the Miami-Dade/Monroe County, Florida, boundary and each migratory group is primarily managed by the respective council. Atlantic migratory group king mackerel (Atlantic king mackerel) and Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel (Atlantic Spanish mackerel) are managed from the Miami-Dade/Monroe County, Florida, boundary to the New York/Connecticut/Rhode Island boundary. The CMP FMP also includes management measures for Gulf migratory group Cobia (Gulf cobia). However, the Atlantic King Mackerel and Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Port Meetings (port meetings) did not directly address Gulf cobia. Information on recent management changes for Gulf cobia can be found in Amendment 32 to the CMP FMP.¹



Development of Mackerel Port Meetings

Over the past few years, both the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries have been undergoing substantial changes.² During their April 2019 and October 2022 meetings, the South Atlantic Council's Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel (AP) passed motions requesting the South Atlantic Council set up a series of in-person meetings to gather more information on the Atlantic king and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries. The South Atlantic Council acknowledged the importance of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the commercial and recreational king and Spanish mackerel fisheries and agreed that a series of in-person port meetings would provide information critical to management of the two fisheries. A plan for holding port meetings throughout the South Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic, and New England regions was developed throughout 2023 and implemented between April 2024 and January 2025.

¹https://gulfcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/CMP-Amendment-32-Final-Draft-COMLETE_508_02172022.pdf

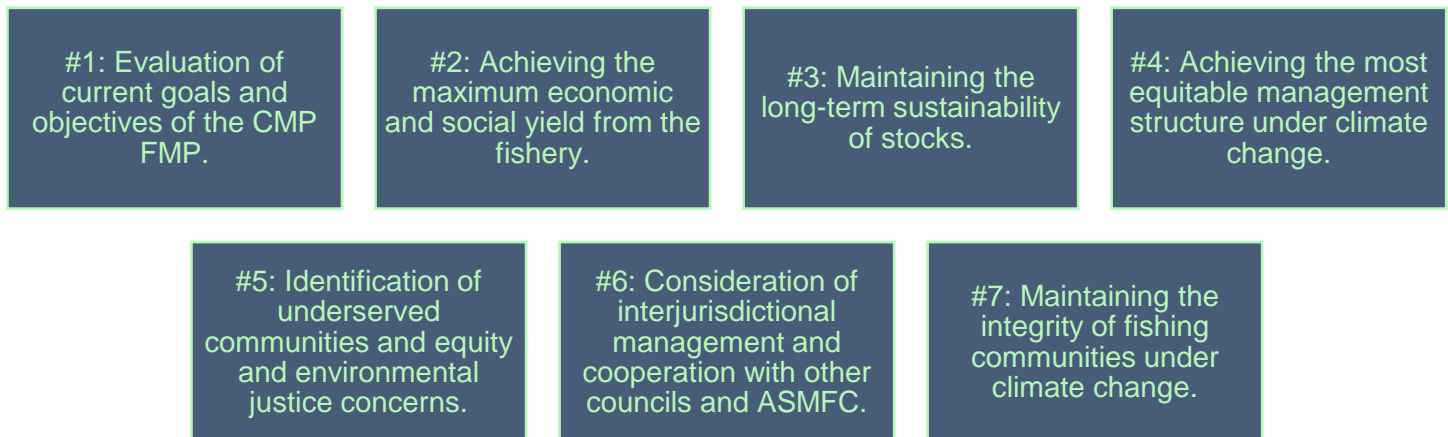
² Fishery Performance Reports: <https://safmc-shinyapps.shinyapps.io/FPRAll/>

In addition to the South Atlantic Council’s effort, the Gulf Council gathered input from stakeholders on Gulf migratory group king mackerel, Gulf migratory group Spanish mackerel, and Gulf migratory group cobia. The Gulf Council’s effort utilized a hybrid approach, holding special sessions of its Coastal Migratory Pelagic and Reef Fish Advisory Panels; virtual public feedback workshops; and an online feedback tool. A summary of the input received is available on the Gulf Council’s website.³

Development of port meetings, including meeting structure, locations, and outreach initiatives was a collaborative effort with multiple agencies participating in the planning process: Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission), Gulf Council, North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Coastal Resources Division, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Goals and Objectives

At the beginning of the port meetings development, the South Atlantic Council discussed their overall goal for the port meetings. These discussions led to the development of seven port meeting objectives. The objectives, as follows, drove both the design of port meeting design and the discussion topics:



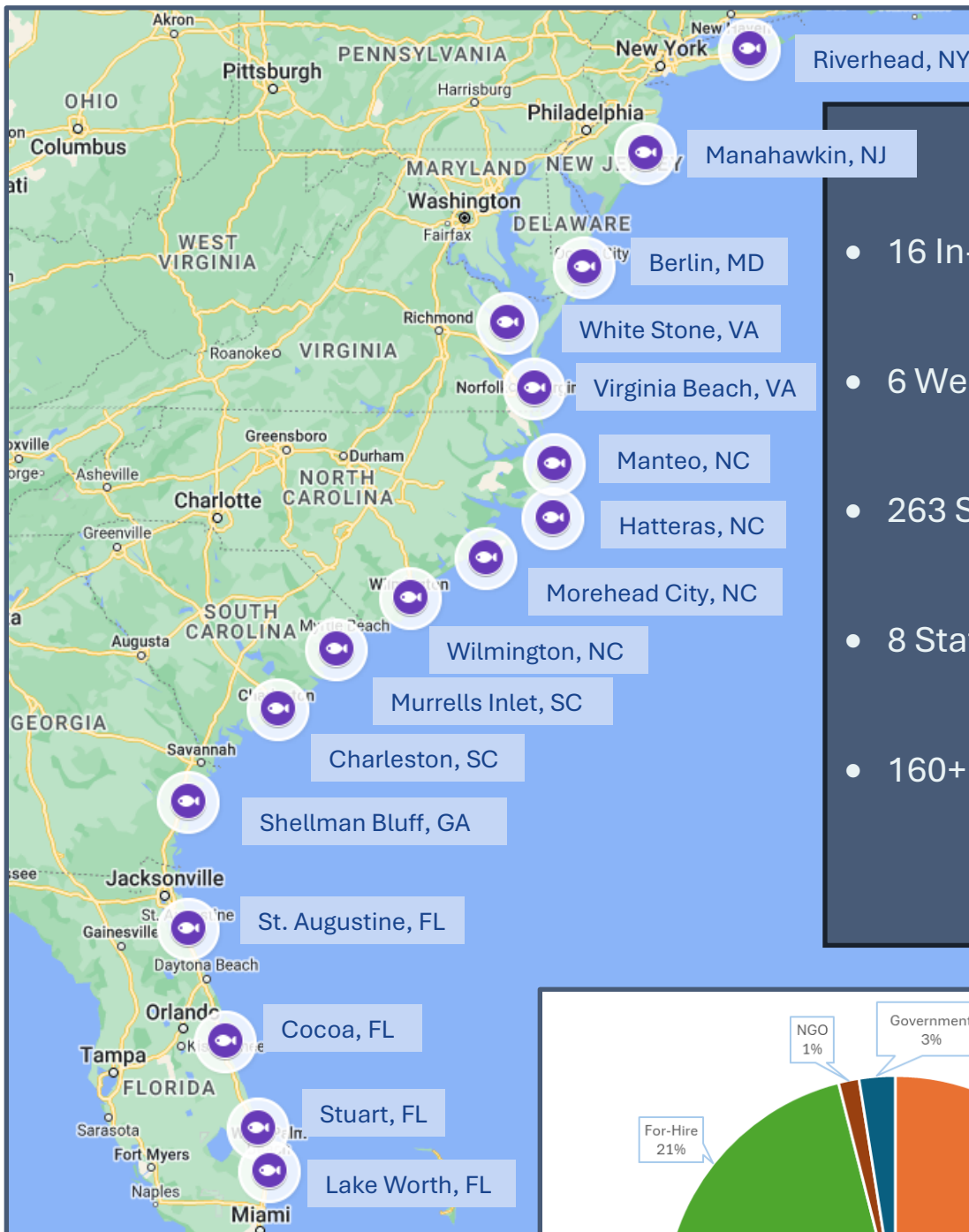
During port meetings, attendees were broken into smaller groups for discussion. Three broad topics were used to guide each group discussion. A list of questions, aimed at the specific goals and objectives, was provided to the staff or Council member facilitating each topic to help encourage discussion. However, conversation was ultimately allowed to flow naturally, allowing attendees to provide the information they felt was important for South Atlantic Council members to have when making decisions. The main discussion topics included:

- Management Changes (*Objective 1, Objective 4, and Objective 6*)
- Environmental Conditions (*Objective 3 and Objective 5*)
- Fishery Dynamics (*Objective 2 and Objective 7*)

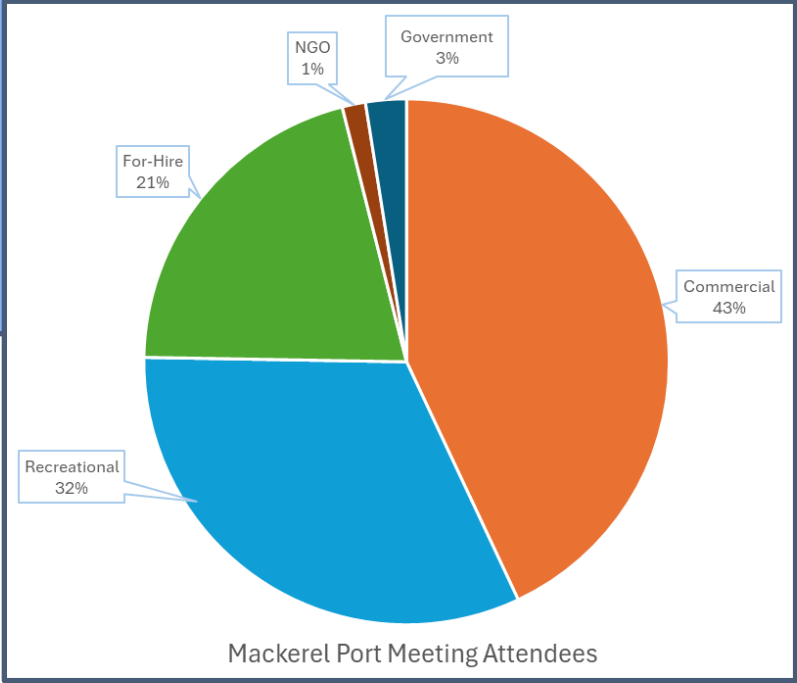
This report will summarize themes that emerged during each state or region’s specific port meeting with respect to each of the main discussion topics and seven objectives.

³ https://gulfcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/C-4-CMP-Special-Engagement-Summary_FINAL.pdf

Port Meetings by the Numbers



- 16 In-Person Meetings
- 6 Webinar Meetings
- 263 Stakeholders
- 8 States Visited
- 160+ Pages of Notes



Mid-Atlantic Region

Environmental Conditions

Theme 1: 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.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel has been available in the New Jersey area since the 1980s with a late summer/early fall run of fish that lasts approximately three weeks.
- In Maryland, giant schools of Atlantic Spanish mackerel can be seen 26-miles offshore in the late-summer into the fall.
- In Virginia, the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery moves quickly but the fish have been arriving earlier in the year than in the past (now June or July). The water temperature needs to be around 68 degrees Fahrenheit at a minimum, but it is better when the water is warmer.

Management Changes

Theme 1: The Northern Zone needs more commercial quota to support the Mid-Atlantic fishery.

- Federal waters are closed to commercial Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest before the fish even arrive in the Mid-Atlantic region.
- North Carolina harvests fish first and often fills the Northern Zone quota, closing federal waters to commercial harvest and forcing fishermen in the Mid-Atlantic to fish in state waters and rely on state bycatch limits (where available).

Theme 2: A lower commercial trip limit for Atlantic Spanish mackerel is preferable to shorter seasons.

- Exact timing of the fishery can change from year to year depending on water temperature, so fishermen would rather have a lower commercial trip limit and a long season to ensure the fishery is open when fish arrive in their area.
- Commercial fishermen in the Mid-Atlantic region need to be able to harvest more than 500 pounds of Atlantic Spanish mackerel when the fish are available, but the current trip limit of 3,500 pounds per day is more than what is needed. A weekly limit was suggested in White Stone, Virginia.
- Lower limits help to keep the market clear, but it is important for the South Atlantic Council to consider how lower trip limits affect discards.

Fishery Dynamics

Theme 1: Atlantic Spanish mackerel is an incredibly important component of multi-species commercial fisheries in the Mid-Atlantic.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel are an important component of a multi-species fishery. In the Mid-Atlantic, they are caught with butterfish, striped bass, flounder, sea trout, and bluefish.
- In White Stone, Virginia, commercial fishermen are not just supplementing their income with Atlantic Spanish mackerel, but they are focusing on the fishery. Commercial businesses derive around 30% of their income, even some as high as 50% from the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery.

Theme 2: There is increasing interest in the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery from the for-hire and private recreational sectors.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel is an ideal target species for half-day trips because it is one of the few fish that can provide clients with a fight and meat. Half-day trips are becoming more popular as few clients want to go offshore due to price increases. Atlantic Spanish mackerel is keeping the charter industry alive because it is still reliable.

- In New Jersey, private recreational fishermen will troll for tuna and opportunistically harvest Atlantic Spanish mackerel in the summer months.

Theme 3: Atlantic king mackerel are available in the Mid-Atlantic region, but the fishery remains opportunistic and sporadic.

- Harvest of Atlantic king mackerel remains sporadic, only occurring when fishermen happen upon Atlantic king mackerel when targeting other species.
- In Virginia Beach, they used to see more Atlantic king mackerel in the 1980s and 1990s. The fish are still seen, but not typically targeted.

North Carolina

Environmental Conditions

Theme 1: Atlantic Spanish mackerel stay in North Carolina longer in the fall and move farther north into the Mid-Atlantic region.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel are moving northward, being caught into the Chesapeake Bay.
- The increasing occurrences of Atlantic Spanish mackerel north of North Carolina are cutting into the already small commercial quota with a lot of pressure during the fall fishery.

Theme 2: 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.

- Poor water quality and pollution due to beach renourishment and dredging, especially in the Southern portion of North Carolina, are negatively affecting Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel, which tend to stay away from the beach when the water is polluted or turbid.
- Development of offshore wind is increasing off the coast of North Carolina and there is concern about noise pollution and magnetic fields having a negative effect on the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries.

Management Changes

Theme 1: 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.

- Federal waters off of North Carolina often close during the top fishing months due to the Northern Zone quota being met.
- The years of data used to allocate the commercial annual catch limit between the Northern and Southern Zones were years when harvest was lower in North Carolina due to fall hurricanes and do not accurately represent harvest capacity in the area.
- The entire Atlantic coast is fishing on the same biomass of fish, but the Southern Zone receives a significantly larger proportion of the commercial quota.
- There is concern that allocations between the commercial and recreational sector do not accurately represent the proportion of harvest between the two sectors.

Theme 2: Improvements to recreational data and accountability should be a priority for the South Atlantic Council.

- The private recreational sector is growing in size and yet does not have any reporting requirements. There should be mandatory logbooks for all fishing, including private recreational fishermen.

Theme 3: 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.

- The three-fish per person Atlantic king mackerel bag limit and 24-inch minimum size limit are working well for fishermen in North Carolina.
- Effort in the Atlantic king mackerel fishery is driven by available time, cost of fuel, and water temperature, not regulations.

Fishery Dynamics

Theme 1: Atlantic Spanish mackerel and Atlantic king mackerel are some of the most important fisheries for the commercial and for-hire industry in North Carolina.

- As other fisheries become more restricted, commercial and recreational fishermen are moving into the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries. It is still easy to successfully make a trip targeting mackerel, especially when compared to the snapper grouper fishery.
- Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are the lifeblood of fish houses in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.
- There has been a switch to using smaller boats in the for-hire industry and those vessels rely on Atlantic Spanish mackerel to run multiple trips a day. Atlantic Spanish mackerel are fun for clients to catch.

Theme 2: Most of Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest occurs in state waters, while the majority of Atlantic King mackerel harvest occurs in federal waters.

- Most of the Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest that occurs in state waters is using gill net gear in the northern portion of the state. Florida fishermen are able to catch their quota using cast nets in state waters, but this style of fishing would not work in North Carolina.
- In the southern portion of the state, there used to be a substantial net fishery for Atlantic Spanish mackerel, but strict regulations have decreased participation.
- While most Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest occurs in state waters, many fishermen hold a federal commercial Spanish mackerel permit in case they need to go into federal waters or in case limited entry is introduced in the future.
- The 1990s were the height of the Atlantic king mackerel fishery, but for-hire trips for Atlantic king mackerel have decreased over the last ten years as fewer people want to pay to go offshore.

South Carolina and Georgia

Environmental Conditions

Theme 1: Fewer Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are seen due to warmer waters, especially inshore.

- In South Carolina, Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel are targeted in the fall when waters are cooler. In the summertime, Atlantic king mackerel tournament fishermen will head offshore for fish.
- In Georgia, warmer waters have resulted in fewer Atlantic Spanish mackerel and Atlantic king mackerel. Waters have remained at 85 degrees Fahrenheit, even offshore. Fishermen are having to go to waters deeper than 100-feet to target Atlantic king mackerel.

Management Changes

Theme 1: No changes to Atlantic king mackerel management or Atlantic Spanish mackerel management are recommended.

- Fishermen are not regularly catching three Atlantic king mackerel per person, so there is no need to change the recreational bag limit. There is no need to change the Atlantic Spanish mackerel bag limit

(currently 15-fish per person), but if reductions were needed, fishermen in South Carolina and Georgia would prefer a smaller bag limit and a longer season.

Fishery Dynamics

Theme 1: Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are opportunistic fisheries for fishermen in South Carolina and Georgia.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel is not an important species for the for-hire sector in South Carolina because it is too unreliable. Atlantic king mackerel is not a consistent catch, but when available it is a day-maker.
- In Georgia, Atlantic king mackerel used to be accessible and easy to catch, but sharks have lowered the trip satisfaction resulting in substantially less targeted effort.

Florida

Environmental Conditions

Theme 1: When and where Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel can be found has changed substantially over the last five years.

- Cold water is what drives Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel south, but temperatures have been increasing with warmer winters.
- The location and timing for runs of Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel are no longer reliable. Fish are staying farther north in northern Florida and southern Georgia and larger fish are staying farther offshore. The fish are also staying more spread out instead of congregating together.
- There are mixed opinions on whether Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are expanding their range northward vs. moving their current range northward.
- Changes in the timing and location of fish have led to questions on whether fishermen are fishing on Atlantic king mackerel or Gulf king mackerel during certain portions of the year, especially in southern Florida near the known mixing zone.

Theme 2: 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.

- Dredging operations and beach renourishments are affecting the health of both the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries. These efforts pollute nearshore waters, and fish will avoid key fishing grounds.
- Space launches are increasing in frequency and preventing fishermen from accessing fishing grounds on the few good weather days that occur.
- Freshwater discharges, which have gotten worse in the last five years, and muddy waters will push Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel offshore causing fishermen to move into federal waters. Some fishermen do not realize that they need federal permits to target these species in federal waters.

Management Changes

Theme 1: There may need to be some modifications to commercial limits for Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel commercial trip limits.

- It is important that fishermen have a high enough trip limit for Atlantic king mackerel to make trips worthwhile when the weather is good, but large amounts of fish on the market can drop the price significantly. The current trip limit system works, but it does cause fluctuations in the market.

- Atlantic King mackerel commercial trip limit should move back to a weight limit as opposed to a number of fish. It will be important to give fishermen some leeway with the exact weight onboard, such as a 5% overage limit.
- A larger trip limit should be considered for Atlantic Spanish mackerel. The current limit is per day, the Council could consider a per trip limit with multiple trips allowed per day or a larger daily limit. The current daily limit starts at 3,500 pounds, but it could be increased to 5,000 pounds per day or even 7,500 pounds per day. Alternatively, other fishermen felt that 3,500-pound trip limit was too high and that a year-round limit (as opposed to a step down) of 1,500 or 1,750 pounds would be more beneficial.
- There are concerns about equitability of access to Atlantic Spanish mackerel between the cast net fishery (in state waters) and the gill net fishery (in federal waters). The 500-pound bycatch limit in state waters under a federal waters closure is only accessible to fishermen using cast net gear, as gill nets are not an allowable gear in Florida state waters. All landings count against the federal annual catch limit.

Fishery Dynamics

Theme 1: Atlantic king mackerel is one of the few 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.

- Fishermen have been targeting Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel for generations.
- The Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries produce the largest runs of fish. They are high volume fisheries where fishermen are able to catch more fish with less effort.
- In southern Florida, charter fishermen will target Atlantic king mackerel when dolphinfish are unavailable.

Theme 2: 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.

- The price of Atlantic king mackerel has been high recently because fishermen are catching fewer fish. However, the economy and higher fuel prices demand higher prices.
- If the price of Atlantic king mackerel rises too high, it begins to compete with other forms of protein.
- Management cannot be based on trying to control the market because it is too variable and affected by fish from different locations, such as Gulf king mackerel harvest.

New England

Environmental Conditions

Theme 1: Atlantic Spanish mackerel are becoming a more regular presence in the New England region, while Atlantic king mackerel remain sporadic.

- The Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery begins in the late summer/early fall (August) along with the false albacore and bonito fisheries.
- When the water is warmer and there is a good run of juvenile menhaden, fishermen report seeing some Atlantic king mackerel in Cape Cod, Massachusetts.
- The Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel are primarily found in 35 feet of water or less, and only in a few specific locations.

Management Changes

Theme 1: There is not currently a need to manage Atlantic king mackerel or Atlantic Spanish mackerel in the New England region.

- While there is not a desire for the New England area to have out of control harvest, right now there is not enough effort to warrant any management.

- If Atlantic Spanish mackerel [or Atlantic king mackerel] were to become more consistent fisheries in the region, management may be needed in the future. It would be important for the South Atlantic Council to be proactive since there is often a lag time between identification of an issue, development and implementation of management measures, and communication of management measures to anglers.
- The South Atlantic Council should focus on management measures for the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic regions where harvest is more significant.

Fishery Dynamics

Theme 1: Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are not targeted by the for-hire industry, but they are an exciting bonus when caught.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel are not used to advertise for-hire trips, but when they are available captains will stop to fish for them because they are an exciting and exotic catch for clients.
- Most for-hire trips that encounter Atlantic Spanish mackerel are targeting hardtails (false albacore and bonito).
- Atlantic Spanish mackerel is more of an experience fish with for-hire clients not looking to harvest them, but they do represent an alternative meat fish for when other species (striped bass) are unavailable due to regulations.

Coastwide Themes and Differences

Similarities Along the Atlantic Coast

Theme 1: 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.

- Fishermen from all states along the Atlantic coast, but especially the Mid-Atlantic, North Carolina, and Florida, noted the importance of Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel to their overall fishing businesses. For commercial fishermen in the Mid-Atlantic, Atlantic Spanish mackerel is a key component of a multispecies fishery that many participants are increasingly reliant on. In North Carolina and Florida, Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel represent two of the few remaining fisheries where it is still easy to make a trip.
- Similarly, the Atlantic king mackerel and especially Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery, have become important for the for-hire component of the recreational sector. As some for-hire businesses move to smaller vessels and fewer offshore trips due to the economy, the mackerel fisheries represent a reliable catch for clients. Both species are good for clients looking for an exciting catch and those looking to take home dinner. Additionally, shorter trips that remain inshore are ideal for families and all businesses to run multiple trips in a day.

Theme 2: Participation in the commercial Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries is stable or decreasing. Participation in the private recreational sector of the fisheries is increasing.

- States throughout the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic noted a stable or decreasing trend in the number of active commercial fishermen. While being experienced in both the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries for all gear types, it was noted specifically that the experimental gill net fishery for Atlantic Spanish mackerel remained small and the offshore gillnet fishery for Atlantic Spanish mackerel has decreased in recent years.
- Alternatively, the increase in recreational effort, specifically from the private recreational component, was noted in most states. More individuals are moving to the coast and participating in saltwater fisheries, including for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel. Improvements in technology have increased participation and the success of private recreational anglers.

Theme 3: Commercial and for-hire fishermen rely on the ability to catch a diverse set of species. Regulations that make this challenging hurt fishing businesses and fish stocks by concentrating effort.

- The ability to target, catch, and retain a diverse suite of species is something of paramount importance to commercial and for-hire businesses. This sentiment was expressed regardless of whether Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel were being harvested as part of a multispecies fishery or as standalone component of business targeting additional fisheries. Being able to bring in a diverse suite of species is better for business than catching and harvesting a large poundage of a single species. It was also noted that restrictive regulations on a single species simply push fishing effort to another species, which is not good for the long-term health of fish stocks or fishing business.

Theme 4: Changes in catch and effort for Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are not driven by issues with the stocks but are a reflection of challenges with the economy and weather.

- As noted above, Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are both considered to be robust and healthy fisheries. However, in recent years there have been fluctuations in landings in both the recreational and commercial sectors. Across the coast, fishermen felt it was important for scientists and managers to understand that fluctuations in landings were not reflective of issues with the Atlantic king mackerel or Atlantic Spanish mackerel stocks. These fluctuations in landings are being driven by other challenges facing the fisheries, including but not limited to, lower commercial participation, decreases in the number of fishable days due to weather, and changes in the economy increasing prices across the board, but especially for fuel.

Theme 5: Changes in Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel distribution are driven in large part by water temperatures.

- While multiple environmental factors are known to affect where and when fish may show up in a given community, when asked about what environmental conditions were known to drive the presence or absence of Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel, water temperature was the only factor noted at all of the port meetings. As the environment is changing, Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel are showing up in new areas and not showing up in areas where they were once reliable. It is still unclear whether this represents an expansion of their known range or a shift in their known range northward.

Theme 6: Sharks have become a significant problem in the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery making harvest challenging and ruining the fishing experience.

- Interaction with and depredation from sharks has become a significant challenge in the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries along the coast. It has become challenging, if not impossible, to land whole mackerel due to depredation and fishermen often have to move locations multiple times to try to avoid interactions. In Florida, dive boat tourism has exacerbated this problem and remains largely unregulated. In Georgia, it was reported that some fishermen now avoid targeting Atlantic king mackerel because interactions with sharks have ruined the fishing experience.

Theme 7: Continued engagement with fishery participants is essential. There needs to be transparency in how data are collected for Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel and communication on South Atlantic Council management decisions.

- Communication with fisheries stakeholders was a topic of discussion at multiple port meetings. In the Mid-Atlantic, fishermen felt that the South Atlantic Council needed to do a better job of engaging fishermen in the management process and communicating regulatory information to those newly participating in these fisheries. In all states, fishermen expressed the importance of continued engagement from the South Atlantic Council, especially in areas that the South Atlantic Council does not reach in-person regularly such as Hyde and Dare Counties in North Carolina.

- All fishermen felt that there needed to be more transparency in regard to the available data and the stock assessment process. The data used should be accessible to fishermen and the South Atlantic Council should better utilize stakeholder input and highlight where that input has been used in the management process.

Differences Along the Atlantic Coast and Between Sectors

Theme 1: 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.

- Throughout the Mid-Atlantic region commercial and recreational fishermen report consistent runs of Atlantic Spanish mackerel, sometimes going back as far as the 1980s. While the exact timing of the fishery may vary slightly from year to year, Atlantic Spanish mackerel are reliably in the region beginning in mid to late summer and into early fall. In North Carolina, the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery has been consistently occurring in the summer into fall, with some fishermen noting that it appears the fish are arriving earlier and staying in the area longer.
- Alternatively, in South Carolina and Georgia, the fisheries are more sporadic. Atlantic king mackerel in particular appear to be remaining offshore in search of cooler water. In Florida, there have been changes in the time of year and locations where Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are found. These changes, as described in the Florida themes section, appear to be driven by changes in climate (waters remaining warm throughout the year) and environmental conditions such as water quality and coastal development activities.

Theme 2: The Atlantic king mackerel fishery remains important in North Carolina and Florida but is less important in South Carolina, Georgia, and the Mid-Atlantic region.

- In the Mid-Atlantic region, the presence of Atlantic king mackerel remains too sporadic for a targeted fishery. Similarly, in South Carolina and Georgia, king mackerel have moved too far offshore to be targeted by recreational and commercial fishermen. However, most commercial fishermen have permits and will keep them for additional income. Furthermore, Atlantic king mackerel tournaments are still popular in North Carolina and Florida.
- In North Carolina and Florida, the historical Atlantic king mackerel fisheries remain popular for both commercial and recreational fishermen. Communities along both coasts continue to rely on the fishery as part of their commercial fishing and for-hire businesses.

Theme 3: 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 permit, 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 like those for currently limited access commercial permits.

- In the Mid-Atlantic region, limited entry for the commercial Atlantic Spanish mackerel permit is undesirable because participation in the fishery is generally low or stable and there are concerns that a limited entry system would prevent younger fishermen from entering the fishery. Additionally, in states like New Jersey, some fishermen gave up their federal permit in order to continue fishing for Atlantic Spanish mackerel in state waters when federal waters are closed.
- In North Carolina, fishermen felt that limited entry for commercial Spanish mackerel was not necessary as the economy (cost of gas, bait, keeping up with regulations) would naturally keep the number of participants in the fishery at an appropriate level. Additionally, most of the Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest in North Carolina occurs in state waters, so a limited access federal permit would have little effect on overall participation.
- In Florida, there was support for a limited access commercial permit for Spanish mackerel. It is common for fishermen to jump into the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery when fishing is good due to the open

access nature of the permit. In addition, or as an alternative, to a limited entry commercial Spanish mackerel permit, an endorsement could be created for the gill net component of the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery. There were also recommendations to consider an income requirement to receive a limited access permit and an apprenticeship program that would allow new entrants into the fishery.

- Some fishermen were in support of limited entry for the coastal migratory pelagics for-hire permit, while others were against limited entry. Some fishermen felt that it was inappropriate to keep adding fishery participants to the for-hire industry while simultaneously restricting the annual catch limits and trying to preserve the current bag limit. Additionally, it was suggested that limited entry would curtail illegal fishing behavior and improve compliance with current reporting requirements. Alternatively, some fishermen felt that limited entry was not needed because offshore charters are already showing a decreasing trend. It would also make it challenging for the younger generation to enter into the fishery. These opinions varied among individuals within each community.

Theme 4: 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 both in terms of the sale of fish supporting local charities and in introducing community members to a family fishery.

- There is concern about accounting for the sale of tournament caught Atlantic king mackerel, especially if allocations and quota become tight in the future. Fishermen felt that it was important to ensure that trip tickets accurately capture tournament catch. Information on the number of tournament-sold fish needs to be more readily available to fishermen, including how many tournament-caught fish are landed by vessels with a commercial king mackerel permit.
- Commercial fishermen expressed concerns about tournament removal of large Atlantic king mackerel which are an important part of the breeding stock. Additionally, many tournament-caught fish are landed by vessels with a commercial king mackerel permit and Atlantic king mackerel that are caught during practice days are sold by commercially permitted vessels. This floods the commercial market causing prices to drop. Finally, there was concern that tournament caught fish are not being handled to HAACP standards. Histamine in poorly handled Atlantic king mackerel is dangerous and will reflect poorly on the commercial industry, hurting sales.
- Alternatively, recreational fishermen noted that Atlantic king mackerel tournaments are important to local communities and charities. They boost the economy with expenditures on fuel, food, hotels, and boat builders. Additionally, tournaments are how a lot of individuals get their start in the Atlantic king mackerel fishery. Finally, many local charities rely on tournament sales for donations.

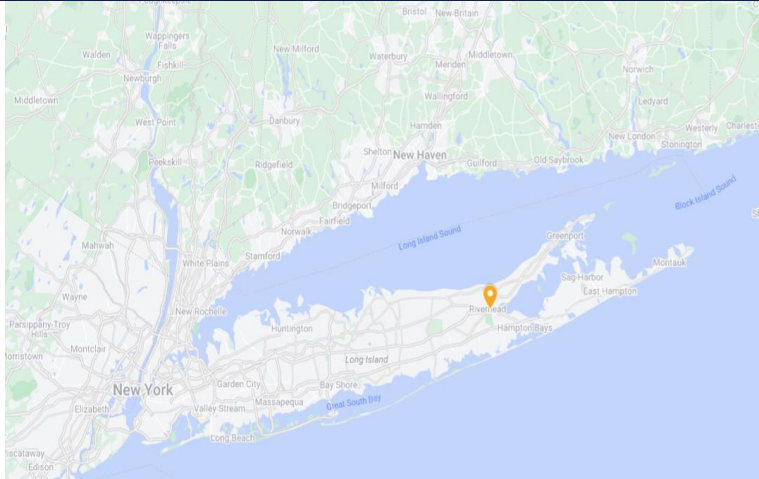
Next Steps

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) national standard guidelines require fishery management councils to establish objectives in each FMP and propose management measures that will achieve the objectives. In establishing the objectives, the councils should balance the biological needs of the fish stock(s) with human need, reconcile both present and future costs and benefits, integrate both private and public interests, and provide for a comprehensive approach to addressing problems within the fishery. As the needs of a fishery change over time, fishery management councils are encouraged to regularly reassess the FMP objectives. Amendment 6 (1992) was the last amendment to list and modify the objectives for the CMP FMP. The South Atlantic Council intends to review and update the goals and objectives for the CMP FMP based on input received during the port meetings. Additionally, the South Atlantic Council intends to base future management decisions, in part, on information gathered during the port meetings process.

DRAFT Appendix A: Port Meeting Summaries

RIVERHEAD, NEW YORK

JUNE 4, 2024 | ATLANTIS BANQUETS AND EVENTS

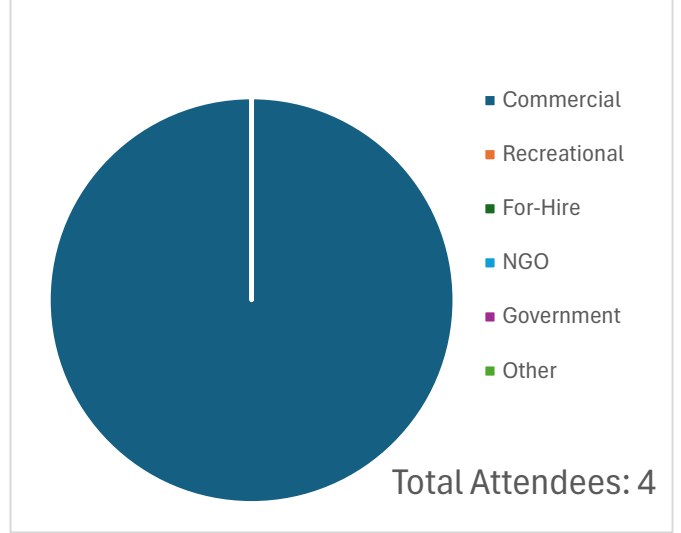
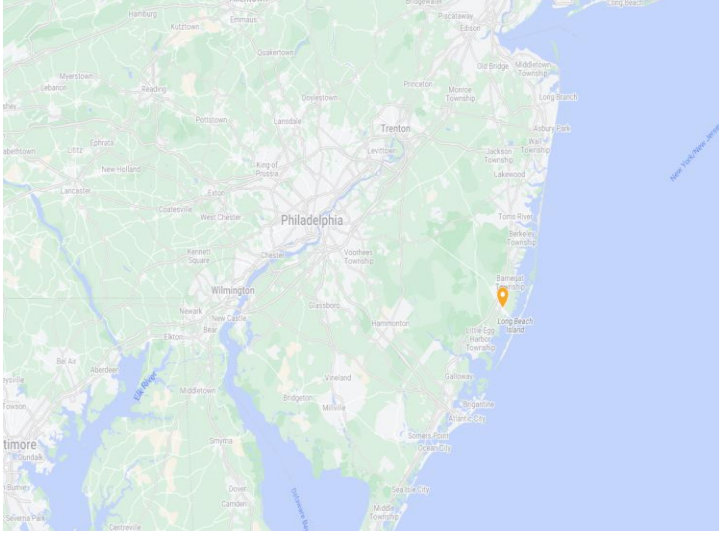


Attendees were primarily Mid-Atlantic Council members.

The New York port meeting was held in conjunction with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's June Council meeting in Riverhead. As such, attendees at the meeting were primarily Mid-Atlantic Council members from multiple states. Their comments from this port meeting have been incorporated into the summaries for New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia.

MANAHAWKIN, NEW JERSEY

NOVEMBER 21, 2024 | STAFFORD TOWNSHIP ADMINISTRATION BUILDING



Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- Recommendation to consider lowering the commercial trip limit in order to extend the season. By the time Atlantic Spanish mackerel get to New Jersey, federal waters have already closed.
 - 750 pounds per day would be a successful trip.
- The Council could consider changes to the current break between the Northern Zone and Southern Zone (NC/SC state line) or even a new zone.
 - Maybe a new break at Ocean City, Maryland or Cape May, New Jersey.
- Limited entry for the commercial Spanish mackerel permit may not be ideal for fishermen in New Jersey.
 - Limited entry may work if it was specific to a zone or area, depending on how the regulations would be written.
 - The permit is currently open access, so many fishermen don't their permits in order to fish in state waters during the federal closures.
 - Fishermen can't give up any components of their business and stay in business.

Environmental Conditions

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel have been caught since the 1980s. They arrive in late summer/early fall and are available for about three weeks in a given fishing location.
 - There has not been a lot of change in timing of the fishery, fall run has been reliable over many years.
- In Manahawkin and northern New Jersey, the fish can be found in 30-40 feet of water, just a few miles offshore. However, in southern New Jersey (near Atlantic City) they are found closer to federal waters.
- There will be winners and losers in climate change. Right now sharks and rays are winners and damage to fishing nets is becoming increasingly common.
- Bad weather is an issue in New Jersey, it keeps fishermen at the dock and breaks fish and bait up.

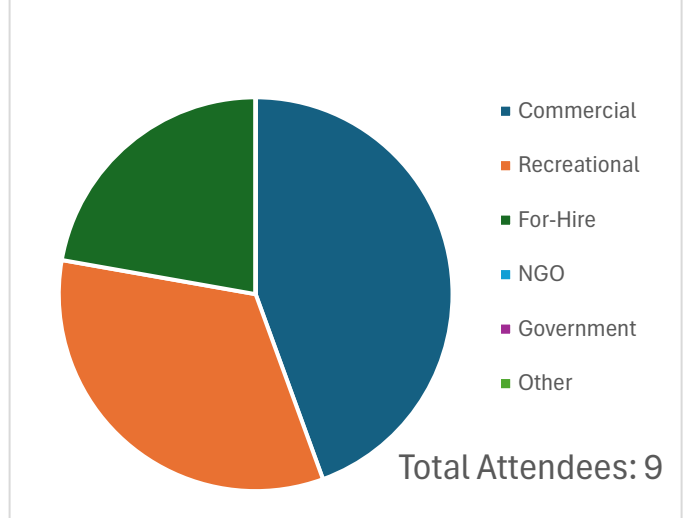
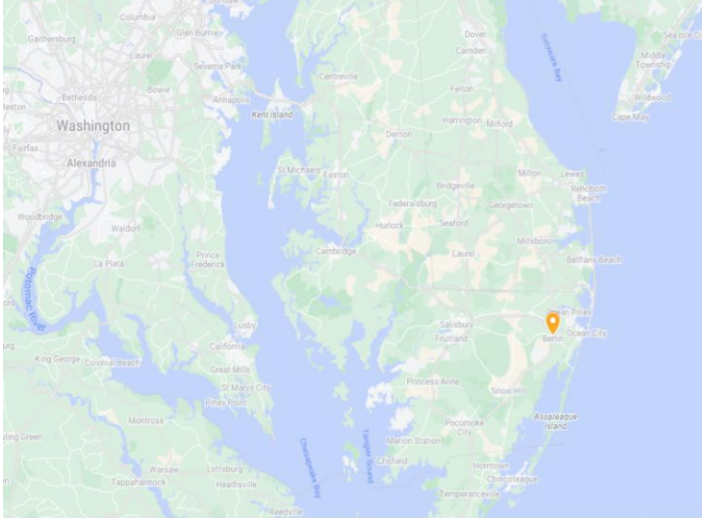
- There are dissolved oxygen issues in Jersey, but pelagics like Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel are more resistant to this issue than other species.

Fishery Dynamics

- Right now, Atlantic Spanish mackerel is closed in federal waters before New Jersey has access so fishing occurs exclusively in state waters.
- Butterfish, sea trout, bluefish, bonita and Atlantic Spanish mackerel all caught together when fishing with sink nets.
 - Spanish mackerel is a key part of the package.
- Commercial fishermen are able to get \$2.00 per pound of Atlantic Spanish mackerel. They are most marketable at one to 1.5 pounds in size, smaller would not be marketable.
 - Some fish are sold locally, but majority goes to Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York.
- Gentrification is an issue in New Jersey, fishermen need access to Atlantic Spanish mackerel to keep docks alive.
- The gear use is very regional, with pear trawls used in New York in the 1980s, small mesh sink nets in New Jersey, and bottom nets in the bay anchovies fishery.
- A few private recreational fishermen troll for Atlantic Spanish mackerel in the summer, even jigging. It is an opportunistic fishery when the fish are available.
 - Recreational effort is increasing, but they are typically targeting tuna and just grab Atlantic Spanish mackerel when seen. Recreational fishing has become more efficient with spot lock.
- Fishermen used to catch Atlantic king mackerel offshore when targeting bluefish, but sharks, whales, and the cost of gas have decreased offshore effort in general.
- There was some concern about wind energy causing pelagics to congregate and future increases in effort of people trolling in the area. Easier fishing usually means more effort.
- Fishermen expressed frustration with the southeast permit office and renewing permits. Suggested that the call line needs to be more user friend and staffed by fishery experts.
- Barnegat Light, New Jersey and north is the main fishery.

BERLIN, MARYLAND

NOVEMBER 20, 2024 | WORCESTER COUNTY LIBRARY – BERLIN BRANCH



Atlantic King and Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- Recommendation to consider multiple levels of allocation between the Northern and Southern Zones, such as some of the quota being allocation based on landings history and some being allocated using an even split.
- A trip limit step down system in the Northern Zone for Atlantic Spanish mackerel might spread catch among the states.
 - Fishermen in Maryland wouldn't need more than 3,500 pounds and would prefer a lower trip limit and more days to fish. However, a 500-pounds trip limit would not be enough.
- The current Atlantic Spanish mackerel size limit is okay, smaller fish are not marketable.
- Recreational fishermen are only keeping 10 Atlantic Spanish mackerel per vessel, so a lower bag limit would be fine.
- There was no interest in limited entry for the commercial Spanish mackerel permit. The current fleet is small, and people are not getting into the fishery. It is important to help younger fishermen.
- Atlantic King mackerel are not as common in Maryland, but fishermen would be interested in the removal limited entry or an exception by area.

Environmental Conditions

- Seeing giant schools of Atlantic Spanish mackerel coming to the area again, about 26 miles offshore/ It is mostly a late summer fall run.
 - July is when the recreational fishery begins, with the commercial fishery kicking off in August.
- Atlantic Spanish mackerel is both an ocean and bay fishery (both sides of the state).

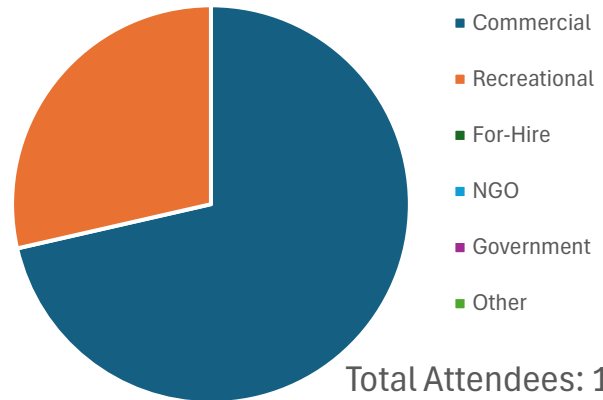
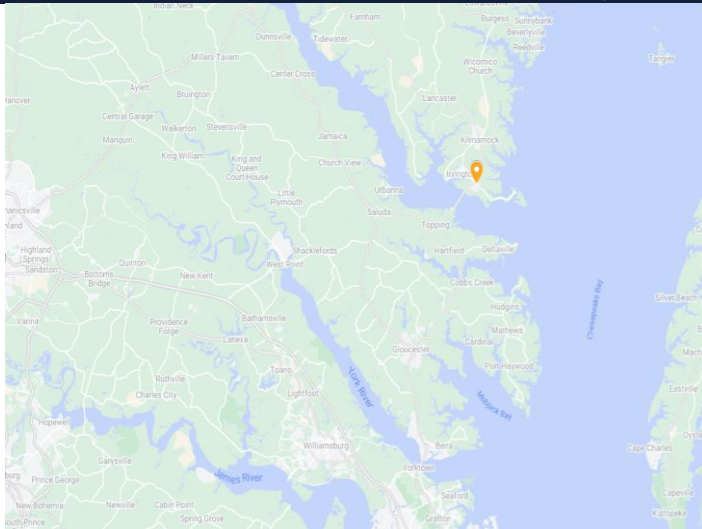
Fishery Dynamics

- Fishermen that are targeting croaker and spot offshore are unable to keep Atlantic Spanish mackerel because federal waters are closed to harvest by the time they arrive.

- Atlantic king mackerel are still not targeted, the fish are available, but gear would have to change.
 - Fishermen used to drift in the summer in the 1980s, but that was challenging and moved onto other things especially due to shark regulations.
- There is an increase in the amount of recreational participation generally, especially with half-day trips. There is the same level of commercial fishing, just 4-5 guys.
 - For recreational anglers Atlantic Spanish mackerel are an easy fish to catch making it a great family trip.
- Commercial effort in the gillnet fishery is down generally, as it varies with the value of other fisheries.
- Trolling for Atlantic Spanish mackerel is a backup plan when fishermen are unable to catch tuna.
- Ribbonfish, bonito, and bluefish are commonly seen when Atlantic Spanish mackerel are caught.
- Fishermen need to ability to diversify their catch. Loss of even one species can have significant effects on a fishing business.
- Most Atlantic Spanish mackerel are sold locally and some to New York and Pennsylvania.
 - \$1.00-2.00 per pound, but a volatile market.
 - The value of Atlantic Spanish mackerel is in its addition to other fisheries when available.
- No Atlantic Spanish mackerel tournaments in the area.

WHITE STONE, VIRGINIA

NOVEMBER 19, 2024 | WHITE STONE TOWN HALL BUILDING



Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- Generally, a flexible management structure is important for Atlantic Spanish mackerel and other species. Management needs to be able to adjust as new fisheries emerge.
 - The risk of constant management changes does not incentivize investment in the fishery.
 - Consistency in communication between state and federal regulators is important.
- Addressing regional allocations is the most pressing management need. There should be a shift of quota to the Northern Zone, as landings have been increasing recently and will continue to increase in the future.
 - The years used for regional allocations are not reflective of the current fishery. It is important to look and where and when fish are being caught now.
- Seasons are not practical management tool in for Atlantic Spanish mackerel because of the migratory nature of the fishery. The peak season varies from year to year.
- Lower commercial trip limits may help extend the season and keep the markets clear, but there was concern about discards.
 - There was debate about what was better for the fishery, one trip at 3,500 pounds per trip or multiple trips at 500 pounds a trip. Recommendation to consider a weekly limit for Atlantic Spanish mackerel.
- The 500-pound bycatch limit in state waters is very important. It is needed for the fishery to remain open under a federal closure.
- Recreational fishermen usually stop at 10 fish per person when there are 3-4 people on a vessel.
- Size limit for Atlantic Spanish mackerel is good.

Environmental Conditions

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel have been arriving earlier than in the past. It used to be July, but now they are showing up in June and staying until late August (sometimes). Fishermen are never sure exactly where or when they are going to show up. It seems to be random, and the fish move quickly.

- Water temperature needs to be around 68 degrees Fahrenheit in the lower Potomac.
- Virginia no longer has winters that are as cold, which is making the eel grass grow thicker. It can be challenging to catch Atlantic Spanish mackerel because of the grass.
 - This can also cause dissolved oxygen and general water quality issues.
- Atlantic Spanish mackerel are not caught close to shore, most fishermen are targeting them in the middle of the Chesapeake Bay.
- Fish showing up early (and going later), water temperature needs to be around 68F in the lower Potomac.
- Fish populations are cyclical, including Atlantic Spanish mackerel.

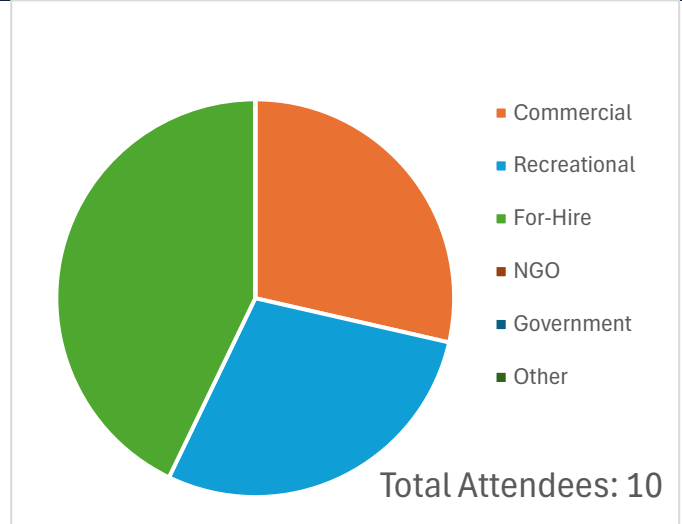
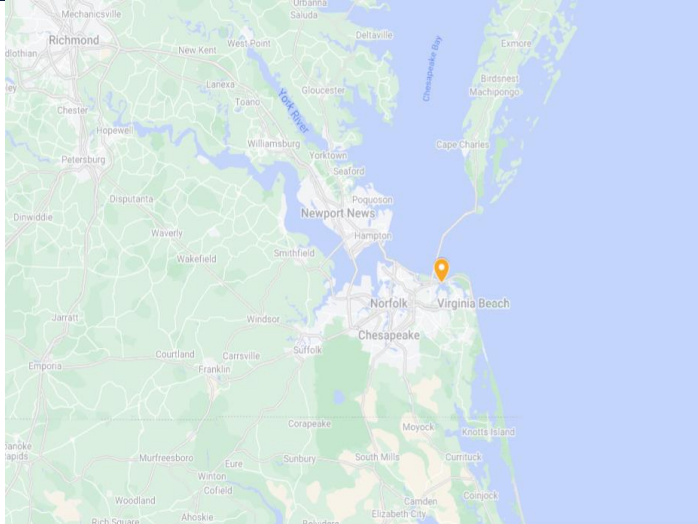
Fishery Dynamics

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel is very important to commercial fishermen in this region of Virginia. It can account for 30% +/- of income, especially in the summer, even as high as 50%. It is not a supplement, but a focus.
- There is a great future for Spanish mackerel in Virginia and it is one of the few viable fisheries left available to fishermen.
 - Atlantic Spanish mackerel is an important commercial fishery in White Stone. There are not many other fisheries to target in the summer. Fuel prices make it too costly to target croaker and Atlantic Spanish mackerel is more practical.
 - Atlantic Spanish mackerel is THE summer fishery, it gets everyone through 4-5 months.
- There are only a few fishermen actively fishing using the experimental gear permit from the Virginia Marine Resources Commission. They are using longer nets and fishing them at night.
 - There are not many people getting into the gillnet fishery or commercial fishing in general. There are also fewer pound nets operating because it is expensive and hard to get reliable help.
 - The experimental gear can take three to six months to get and it is a significant investment to participate. Fishermen that are participating need to be provided consistency and needs to remain profitable.
- The price per pound for Atlantic Spanish mackerel can vary by trip limit, weather, and other factors. Currently able to get around \$1.00 per pound.
 - The market can only support so many fishermen.
 - When fish leave North Carolina, the market price increases. However, Virginia is on the back end of the fishery, by the time the fish get to Virginia it is already a 500-pound trip limit.
 - Fishermen often don't know price until fish are at the dock.
- It is important for the South Atlantic Council to understand that years with low landings are driven by the economy, not by Atlantic Spanish mackerel abundance.
- There is no user conflict between the commercial, recreational, and for-hire sectors.
- The South Atlantic Council should promote the sustainability and importance of the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery.
- There has been an increase in targeting of Atlantic Spanish mackerel by the for-hire industry. Captains and clients want to bring fish back and the rockfish fishery has become less popular due to regulations.

- Mostly trolling, casting into baitfish you're more likely to get bluefish.
- There is a local Atlantic Spanish mackerel tournament, with approximately 200 boats participating.
- Fishermen interact with bluefish and bunker, but overall Atlantic Spanish mackerel is a very clean fishery.

VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

NOVEMBER 18, 2024 | BROCK ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER



Atlantic King and Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- The current recreational limits for Atlantic Spanish mackerel and Atlantic king mackerel are good. For-hire trips are not often meeting the limits. There is often no reason to keep many fish, clients just want dinner or not even to keep fish because they are staying at a hotel.
 - If the size limit was any higher there would be some days that fishermen wouldn't be able keep any Atlantic Spanish mackerel. Releases often don't survive, so there are concerns about dead discards.
 - It is important for the recreational fishery not to experience any closures because the timing of the fishery can be volatile. Summer is an important time and 10-Atlantic Spanish mackerel per person is as low as the bag limit could go and sustain fishing businesses.
 - There could be consideration of different bag limits for the private recreational and for-hire components. However, it was noted that this is added complexity and could be hard to enforce (like bluefish regulations).
 - Sector separation could be considered.
- A commercial trip limit step down system could be considered for Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery in order to extend the season.
- Fishermen were indifferent to limited-entry for the for-hire coastal migratory pelagics permit because they are primarily fishing in state waters. However, it was noted that limited entry is generally unpopular in the area.
- There is no need for limited entry in the commercial Spanish mackerel fishery.

Environmental Conditions

- This year (2024), there was more cold water (around 72 degrees Fahrenheit). Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishing is better when the water is between 75-80 degrees Fahrenheit.

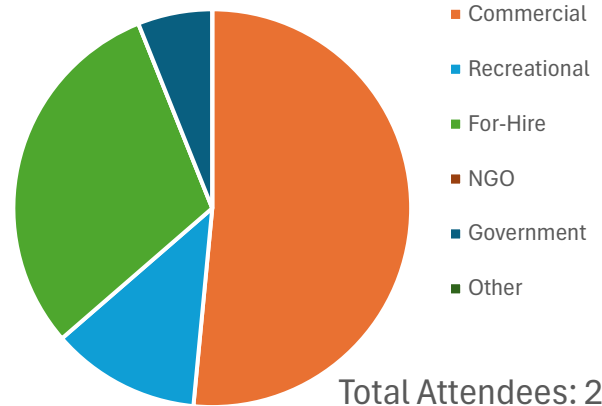
- The beginning and end of the season are when fishermen see smaller fish (also deeper in the Chesapeake Bay and up north).

Fishery Dynamics

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel is what is keeping the charter industry alive, it is still reliable. For commercial fishermen it allows you to diversify and pay bills.
- The Virginia Beach area is undergoing a significant amount of change, everyone is trying something new.
- Atlantic Spanish mackerel has become a targeted commercial fishery over the last three years.
 - There used to be a pound net fishery but sea turtle regulations made it too challenging to participate.
 - There are around 10-12+ gillnetters as part of the experimental permit in Virginia (longer net, set at night and tended).
 - This fishery is conducted with float nets, so fishing at night avoids user conflict.
 - Croaker and spot have become less available and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are an alternative and a way to diversify in the summer.
 - Fishermen are still learning how and when to catch Spanish mackerel.
- The price of Atlantic Spanish mackerel was low this year compared to the last few years (\$0.80-1.50 per pound this year, \$2.00-2.25 for medium fish).
 - It is better financially to catch the larger fish, but bigger fish don't go into the bay (2-4 pounds).
 - When Atlantic Spanish mackerel are available it can get a fishing business through to next year.
- Atlantic Spanish mackerel is very important for the charter fleet as it is one of the few fish that can fight and provide meat. It is becoming more important as prices increase and clients can no longer afford to go offshore.
- Demand for half day for-hire trips, which target Atlantic Spanish mackerel, has increased. Clients no longer want to go offshore because of the cost and businesses can run multiple 2-3 hour trips.
 - Demand for trips is down this year compared to the last few years (2018 and 2029, excluding 2020 because of the pandemic).
 - For-hire trips will troll for Atlantic Spanish mackerel in the morning and then move to drum or cobia (ideal trip). Preferences vary between Atlantic Spanish mackerel and ribbonfish.
- There has also been a decline in private recreational boats this year, but overall, an increase over the last five years.
 - Private recreational fishermen will fish for drum over Atlantic Spanish mackerel when available.
- Hooked on Hope is an Atlantic Spanish mackerel tournament that over 20 boats participate each year.
- Atlantic Spanish mackerel are caught with bluefish, ribbonfish, juvenile cobia.
- Few Atlantic king mackerel are seen, so they are not directly targeted. However, they used to be seen more often in the 1980s-1990s.
- Commercial and recreational fishermen used to not travel far to fish, but now they must travel based on winds and water temperature to locate open fisheries. However, it is important not to travel too far because of the cost of gas.

MANTEO, NORTH CAROLINA

APRIL 4, 2024 | DARE COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING



Atlantic King Mackerel Management Changes

- Generally, fishermen felt that the bag limits, trip limits, and size limit for Atlantic king mackerel was acceptable. However, tournament sales need to be addressed.
 - There was a recommendation for a decrease in the size limit for Atlantic king mackerel due to discards of smaller fish.
 - Private recreational fishermen have a hard time identifying between Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel. A 22-in minimum size limit would eliminate dead discards.
- The commercial king mackerel permit should remain limited entry.

Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel participation in Florida is stable but in North Carolina there is still fluctuation. However, that fluctuation is not enough to warrant limited entry.
 - Overall, limited entry for the commercial Atlantic Spanish mackerel permit won't impact the fishery because it primarily occurs in state waters and economics manages participation.
 - Atlantic Spanish mackerel is a steppingstone fishery because it is easy to get into when beginning.
- No changes needed to recreational management but could handle a 10-fish per person bag limit if *absolutely necessary*.
- There was concern expressed about the recent Spanish mackerel stock assessment and recreational landings.
- Limited entry for the for-hire coastal migratory pelagics permit: concern about younger guys being able to enter the fishery and recommended leasing terms or time limit, flexibility in permit.
- The recreational accountability measures need to be revised, it is not fair and equitable to not have in-season measures for the recreational fishery.

- There needs to be an increase in the commercial quota allocated to the northern zone for Atlantic Spanish mackerel. The years used to set allocations between the Northern Zone and the Southern Zone were low landings years in the Northern Zone due to hurricanes.
- There needs to be at least a one-million-pound commercial quota for Atlantic Spanish mackerel in Northern Zone
- Commercial fishermen would consider a November season start, to facilitate seasonal transfer of allocation between the Northern Zone and the Southern Zone.
 - Concern about what would happen if the 500-pound bycatch exceeds the remaining Southern Zone quota in the event of a transfer. It was suggested to only consider allowing transfers of 50% quota or less.
 - It is important to avoid a Florida vs. North Carolina mentality.

Other Recommended Management Changes

- The commercial, for-hire and private recreational fisheries are three different sectors with three different goals, need to recognize this for proper management.
- The commercial sector has all of their landings accounted for and the private recreational sector needs to report just like the commercial sector. The recreational sector is only increasing in size and needs to be reporting for all species. This should be a top priority for the South Atlantic Council.
 - There could be an app for recreational reporting.
 - VSSL and eTrips and trip ticket software is very dated. There should be fewer questions and economics questions should be removed.
 - MRIP-FES data should not be used for science and management.
 - There should be no reallocation between the sectors without quality data.
- Stock assessments for Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel should be conducted every five years not ten years.
- The South Atlantic Council is choosing not to act on data, even when it was good enough for a stock assessment results, and it is resulting in the public losing trust.
 - The South Atlantic Council is wasting time not taking action when needed and fishermen are losing faith, they can't wait years. They should have yanked for-hire permits for non-compliance a long time ago.

Fish Movement and Populations

- In recent years, Atlantic Spanish mackerel have stayed in waters off North Carolina a lot longer in the fall.
 - Atlantic Spanish mackerel are caught in the fall normally, but there isn't as big of a September or October fishery because federal waters have closed for commercial fishing and there is only the 500-pound limit in state waters. By November, the Atlantic Spanish mackerel are gone off of North Carolina.
- Atlantic Spanish mackerel are moving north, into the Chesapeake Bay

- The Atlantic Spanish mackerel population is abundant. You can't measure abundance strictly by landings because lots of variables affect landings and the fishing season (number of fishermen, economics, weather, etc.)

Co-Occurring Species

- When ribbonfish show up so do the Atlantic Spanish mackerel. Bluefish are often mixed in with Atlantic Spanish mackerel and the bluefish quota is not much more than the Atlantic Spanish mackerel quota.

Communities, Effort, and Adaptations

- The Council needs to hold more meetings in the Outer Banks area. Dare and Hyde Counties need more outreach
- Loss of working waterfront for king mackerel

Water Quality and Other Concerns

- The amount of freshwater in the Albemarle and Pamlico Sound is causing issues for the Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel fisheries.
- Harmful algal blooms have only occurred in the western part of the Albemarle Sound.
- There is concern about the development of offshore wind farms, specifically with noise and magnetic fields affecting fish,
- Dredging activities have a negative effect on the environment, including loss of clarity and gear impacts.

Commercial Dynamics

- When the weather is right, Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel will move offshore, and fishermen have to fish in federal waters.
- The South Atlantic Council should never consider taking allocation from the commercial sector and giving it to the recreational sector with the reasoning that the quota is too many fish for the commercial sector.
- When asked if Atlantic Spanish mackerel should be managed solely by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, attendees expressed concern about how this went with Atlantic cobia.
- Tournament sales are a major problem for the commercial fishery. The market cannot handle the number of fish during tournaments, and it is causing user conflict.
 - There were concerns about illegal sale of tournament caught fish and money not going to charity.
 - The tournaments target larger spawners,
- The Atlantic Spanish mackerel price is dependent on Gulf volume, increases in Gulf Spanish mackerel landings means a lower price in North Carolina. However, the price per pound is still better than it was previously.
 - During the fall, you can get a good price for Atlantic Spanish mackerel because fishing in Florida has not started.
- Movement of Atlantic Spanish mackerel north has resulted in the commercial quota in the Northern Zone getting met much faster than in previous years.

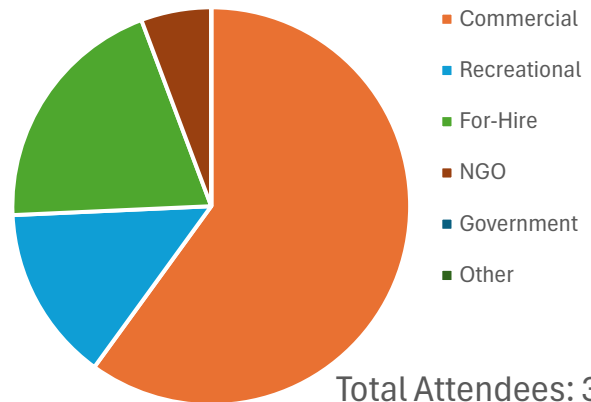
- When fishermen are fishing on the 500-pound for Atlantic Spanish mackerel in state waters they are interacting with spot, sea mullet, and false albacore. However, if the full limit is available for Atlantic Spanish mackerel, that is the full focus of the trip.
- Ultimately, regulations just switch pressure to different fisheries when what fishermen really need is the ability to diversify their catch.
- Atlantic Spanish mackerel and Atlantic king mackerel are the lifeblood of fish houses along the Outer Banks, especially in Hatteras and Ocracoke.

Recreational Dynamics

- Mackerel fishing is a staple of the charter fishing industry in North Carolina. Recreational fishermen target Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel because when it is the right time of year, the right water temperature, they are available and easy to catch!
- Demand has not changed, but the for-hire fishing has evolved because Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel were the only species available.
- There are more private recreational fishermen operating in the area,
- Available time, fuel cost, and water temperature are what determine the Atlantic king mackerel fishery.
 - Atlantic King mackerel for-hire trips are full day trips, running 25-30 miles offshore.
 - Covering the cost of fuel becomes a challenge for half-day trips.
 - Atlantic king mackerel is often a fallback for the tuna fishery.
- There is no longer a fall fishery for Atlantic king mackerel, it now occurs in mid-summer months.
- Similarly, time and money are what dictate Atlantic Spanish mackerel trips. They will be targeted over other species if they are more accessible.
- Tournaments impacting the Outer Banks as much as other areas and tournament sales should not be allowed.
- Fishermen see false albacore, ribbonfish, lizard fish, and bluefish when targeting Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel. They will harvest any species as most clients just want to see action.
 - The year of deepwater horizon oil spill, fishermen saw more species in federal waters.
- Fishing techniques have not changed but fuel is causing changes, tackle is also increasing in price.
- Shark depredation has become a significant problem in the Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel fisheries.

HATTERAS, NORTH CAROLINA

APRIL 3, 2024 | HATTERAS VILLAGE CIVIC CENTER



Atlantic King Mackerel Management Changes

- The commercial sector is not currently affected (restricted) by Atlantic king mackerel regulations.
- The recreational size limit and bag limit of three-fish per person should remain status quo. Fishermen have switched from wanting as many Atlantic king mackerel as possible to being happy with three.
 - Abundance of the species is high, so trip and bag limits could be higher.
- The number of Atlantic king mackerel tournaments is increasing as is participation in the tournaments.
 - Recommendation to stop tournament sales of Atlantic king mackerel because it floods the market and drops the price.
 - There is concern about the illegal sale of tournament caught fish and proceeds not going to state-approved charities. Additionally, there is concern that tournament caught fish are not handled according to HAACP guidelines (not iced, gutted, etc.)
 - Consider requiring tournament-caught Atlantic king mackerel to be donated to food banks.

Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- The 15 fish per person recreational limit for Atlantic Spanish mackerel is good but a little high.
- Recommendation to consider revising the commercial and recreational allocation for Atlantic Spanish mackerel, prioritizing the American consumer.
- There needs to be an increase in the commercial quota allocated to the northern zone for Atlantic Spanish mackerel. Every year for the past few years the Northern Zone has hit their commercial quota.
 - All Atlantic states are fishing on the same biomass, but Florida (the Southern Zone) receives a much larger allocation than North Carolina (the Northern Zone).
 - Increasing occurrences of Spanish mackerel and harvest up north is cutting an already small quota into smaller and smaller pieces.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel is an expensive fishery to enter, and a limited entry Spanish mackerel permit is unlikely to make a substantial difference in effort.

Other Recommended Management Changes

- Limited entry for the coastal migratory pelagics for-hire is a controversial subject, but you cannot keep adding fishery participants while simultaneously restricting the annual catch limits and trying to preserve the current bag limit.
 - Limited entry would improve compliance with current reporting requirements.
 - It is unfair for the for-hire industry to be open when commercial fishermen are so heavily regulated.
 - The for-hire industry should not fill the void left by commercial fishermen who are being pushed out of their fisheries.
 - Alternatively, some fishermen felt that limited entry was not needed because offshore charters are already showing a decreasing trend. It would also make it challenging for the younger generation to enter into the fishery
- There needs to be better recreational reporting requirements. MRIP does not provide sufficient or accurate landings information.
 - Commercial fishermen have consequences for non-reporting.
- There were fishermen both for and against the idea of a recreational permit for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel. Some felt it was important for the Council to spend time focusing on recreational accountability, while others had concerns about issues with commercial permits occurring in the recreational fishery. All agreed that there needed to be a way for the younger generation to get into fisheries both recreational and commercial.

Fish Movement and Population

- The abundance of Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel has not changed, and fishermen see a broad range of fish sizes in both fisheries.
 - December is now a month available to fish for Atlantic king mackerel inshore.
 - The Atlantic King mackerel hook and line fishery is affected by water temperature.
- The Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery occurs beginning in May to mid-October in the sounds as well as ocean. The fish are clearly expanding their range farther north.
- There are no water quality issues in Hatteras, but the weather is worse now than before,
 - There are fewer fishable days and as a result fewer fishing trips out of Oregon Inlet in the past two years.

Co-Occurring Species

- Sharks are a huge problem in the Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel fisheries. They are ruining fishing opportunities and affecting how the fishery is prosecuted.
- It is important for management to consider how these fisheries interact with other species.
- Dolphin (mammal) and cormorants compete with fishermen for fish.

Communities, Effort, and Adaptation

- The social and economic impacts of regulations are important to evaluate on a community-basis.
- 40+ years ago there were a lot more boats participating in the Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel fisheries.
- Dare and Hyde Councils (especially Swan Quarter and Ocracoke communities) need more outreach from the Council.
 - There is a high reliance on the king mackerel fishery in Hatteras.
- Atlantic Spanish mackerel is important to the local community because it is reasonably priced and accessible to low-income consumers.
- The Council needs to spend more time evaluating the effect of regulations on fish houses.

Commercial Dynamics

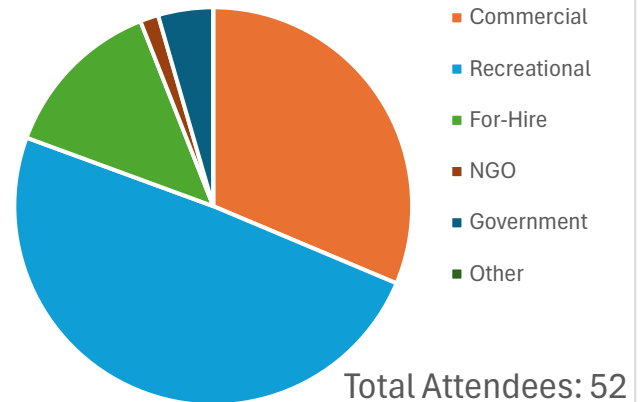
- Commercial fishermen target Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel because it is easy to make a trip and they are some of the only viable fisheries left due to regulations, it's not worth it to get a commercial snapper grouper permit.
- The Atlantic king mackerel market is volatile. Any harvest on the east coast can hurt the price.
 - Sales from Atlantic king mackerel tournaments can drop the price significantly.
 - Atlantic king mackerel from Florida are lower quality and drop the price of North Carolina caught king mackerel.
- For both Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel there are enough fishermen to drive down the price, but not enough fishermen to catch the entire stock of fish.
- Majority of the Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest is occurring in state waters utilizing gill nets while Atlantic king mackerel remains a primarily federal waters fishery.
 - Inefficiency was introduced in Florida with the state waters gill net ban. However, fishermen are still able to catch their quota using cast nets and hook and line. Cast nets would not work in North Carolina.
- Poor recreational data streams negatively affect commercial fishermen via allocation. All components of the recreational sector need to be reporting their catch and effort.
- Cobia, False Albacore, and Bluefish are all important species caught with Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel, and all go to the consumer. However, Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel are the key fisheries keeping the industry afloat.
- Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel releases are all regulatory.
- Live-bait tournaments are having a negative effect on the commercial industry.
 - Tournaments target the larger Atlantic king mackerel, catching more large fish in one day than most commercial fishermen do in years.
 - Tournament sales allow recreational fishermen to circumvent commercial requirements and hurt the market price.
 - Histamine in poorly handled Atlantic king mackerel is dangerous and will reflect poorly on the commercial industry, hurting sales.

Recreational Dynamics

- For-hire trips target Atlantic Spanish mackerel in the summer because it's possible to run multiple half-day trips. Atlantic king mackerel are targeted in the fall because they are readily available, exciting to target and good for eating.
 - Hatteras had a good Atlantic king mackerel fishery until striper fishing exploded up north, since then participation has been down.
- Recreational fishermen are not keeping 15 Atlantic Spanish mackerel per person, 6-8 Atlantic Spanish mackerel would be considered a good opportunity.
- Atlantic Spanish mackerel is very important for the NC for-hire industry.
 - In the summer captains can run inshore trips 2x a day.
 - In Hatteras seeing some change to smaller boats which rely on the 2x day Spanish trips.
- Atlantic King mackerel has become more of a tournament fish.
 - Fewer charters have been targeting king mackerel over the last 10 years
 - The 1990s were the height of the Atlantic king mackerel fishery
 - Charters that used to focus on Atlantic king mackerel now focus on dolphin and tuna in Hatteras
 - Additionally, a lot of regular clients bought their own boats.
- Atlantic King mackerel is not a good candidate for a catch and release fishery. They are not easy to release safely, and many charters only want a few fish (maybe 10-Atlantic king mackerel on a six-person trip).
 - Captains will change to a different species (dolphin, wahoo) after they've caught enough Atlantic king mackerel.
 - Some for-hire clients like to hear "you caught your limit" and this year captains have started to self-regulate limit.
- There are not as many Atlantic King mackerel tournaments in Hatteras, but the tournament boats fish in the area.
 - Tournaments negatively affect the for-hire industry both before and after because bait fishing becomes more challenging.
 - Catch and release is not viable for Atlantic king mackerel tournaments as it is dangerous and harmful for fish.
- When fishing for Atlantic Spanish mackerel, fishermen interact with bluefish, blackfins, marlin, sails, wahoo. When fishing for Atlantic king mackerel fishermen interact with little tunny, amberjacks, grouper, and red snapper.
 - Some fishermen are worried about the abundance of little tunny. Don't want management measures for them, as they are day makers.
- Live bait fishing started to gain popularity in 1987. Fishermen are now casting more for Atlantic Spanish using clark spoons and gigging for Atlantic king mackerel.
- Fishermen are worried about unfishable days being reflected in data feeding assessments, swells kill the Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel bite.
 - There is already a lack of trust in the information that is feeding assessments.

MOREHEAD CITY, NORTH CAROLINA

APRIL 2, 2024 | NC DIVISION OF MARINE FISHERIES CENTRAL DISTRICT OFFICE



Management Changes

- The current recreational bag limit and size limit for Atlantic king mackerel are appropriate.
- Recommendation to remove the size limit for Atlantic Spanish mackerel as smaller fish are often thrown back dead. Fishermen don't target smaller Atlantic Spanish mackerel but those that are caught are fragile.
 - Additional recommendation to consider gill net mesh size when setting size limits.
- Recommendation to take a more regional approach to management, even more so than the current northern and southern zone system.
- It is important that any regulations implemented be enforceable at the state and federal levels.

Fish Populations and Movement

- The Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel stocks are both robust and healthy.
- Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel are extending their range further north.
- There is a lot of pressure on Atlantic king mackerel in the fall months.
 - Spring fish are smaller, use artificial baits.
 - Fall larger fish, natural baits.
- The distribution of Atlantic Spanish mackerel is very dependent on water temperature.
 - Cold fronts will cause Atlantic Spanish mackerel to change locations.
 - Atlantic Spanish mackerel are showing up later in Florida and not staying as long.
- Fishermen have been seeing larger Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel in recent years.
 - 50-pound king mackerels are more common now than they were in the "good old days."

Water Quality and Other Concerns

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishing declines when water is turbid (ex. after a hurricane).
- There is concern about the perception that Atlantic king mackerel contains unsafe levels of mercury. Is there funding to look at mercury in king mackerel, following up on previous studies?

- There have not been any recent harmful algal blooms in the Morehead City area but there are concerns that blooms could become a problem in the future.

Communities, Effort, and Adaptations

- Commercial fishermen adapt to changes in the Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel fisheries (and other fisheries) by targeting other species. Fishermen also have to be mobile so that they can move based on where the fish they are able to target are located.
- The loss of working waterfronts and price of permits is limiting the number of participants in commercial fisheries.
 - It is important that scientists understand that lower landings are reflecting these challenges and not an issue with the Atlantic king or Spanish mackerel stocks.

Commercial Dynamics

- Commercial fishermen target Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel because they know how to successfully prosecute the fisheries and access to other fisheries is cost prohibitive.
 - For example, Atlantic King mackerel is a sustainable fishery and snapper grouper species are more restrictive.
 - Fishermen don't have to travel as far offshore to target Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel, so they burn less fuel (less cost).
 - Fishermen don't travel more than 100+ miles.
- The market price for both Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel is as good as it has ever been, but when it drops it drops fast and low.
 - The Atlantic King mackerel market has always been volatile.
 - Fall can be a challenging time to move Atlantic king mackerel because the market is often flooded.
 - Price and demand go down in summer regardless of tournaments because of the high commercial trip limit.
 - Atlantic king mackerel is not a sought after delicacy locally, so most product is shipped up north.
 - Atlantic Spanish mackerel are sold at around five to six pounds, even as high as twelve pounds.
- Catch diversity is incredibly important for commercial fishermen but regulations make this challenging.
- In the Morehead City area, majority of the Atlantic Spanish mackerel are caught using gill nets, for hook and line fishermen it is bycatch.

Recreational Dynamics

- Recreational fishermen choose to target Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel because they inexpensive and easy fish to target and you can still fish in marginal weather.
 - Easy = less of a need for technology but there is still a lot of money invested in fishing.

- For Atlantic Spanish mackerel, specifically, the accessibility and abundance of the fish drives participation. This is a great fishery for children.
- For Atlantic king mackerel, specifically, it is an exciting fish to catch and for for-hire business it brings in clients. This is a great family fishery.
- Smaller fishing vessels, especially the for-hire industry, are very reliant on the Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel fisheries.
- Fishermen don't keep as many Atlantic Spanish mackerel as they could with the current bag limit.
- In the 1970s, most fishing was offshore trolling, and the pier was live bait fishing. Then the live bait fishery came offshore thanks to improvements in technology and the tournament experience.
- There has been an increase in private and for-hire recreational participation for both Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.
 - The boating industry has changed, generally.
 - Demand for for-hire trips has increased, with less expensive trips becoming more desirable.
 - There has been an increase in tourism with the advent of social media.
 - Social media influence has changed the mindset and activity of fishermen. Clients want to explore different techniques and even when they travel from farther away, they know that fish they are interested in catching.
- Catch and release might work for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel as both species survive well after release, especially Atlantic king mackerel.
- Recreational fishermen interact with wahoo (kept), sharks, greater amberjack, cobia, live bait species, sailfish, and bluefish (bait) when targeting Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.

Atlantic King Mackerel Tournaments

- There is concern about accounting for the sale of tournament caught Atlantic king mackerel, especially if allocations and quota become tight in the future. It is important to ensure that trip tickets accurately capture tournament catch.
 - Information on the number of tournament sold fish needs to be more readily available to fishermen, including how many tournament caught fish are landing by vessels with a commercial king mackerel permit.
- There were concerns about tournament removal of large Atlantic king mackerel.
- Many tournament caught fish are landed by vessels with a commercial king mackerel permit.
- Atlantic king mackerel that are caught during practice days are being sold by commercially permitted vessels. This floods the commercial market causing prices to drop.
- Atlantic king mackerel tournaments are important to local communities and charities.
 - Economy boost! (fuel, food, hotels)
 - Boat builders (state economy)
 - Tournaments are how a lot of individuals get their start in the Atlantic king mackerel fishery.
 - Local economies see a huge boost from tournaments (fuel, hotels, food, tackle, etc.)
 - Local charities rely on tournament sales for donations.

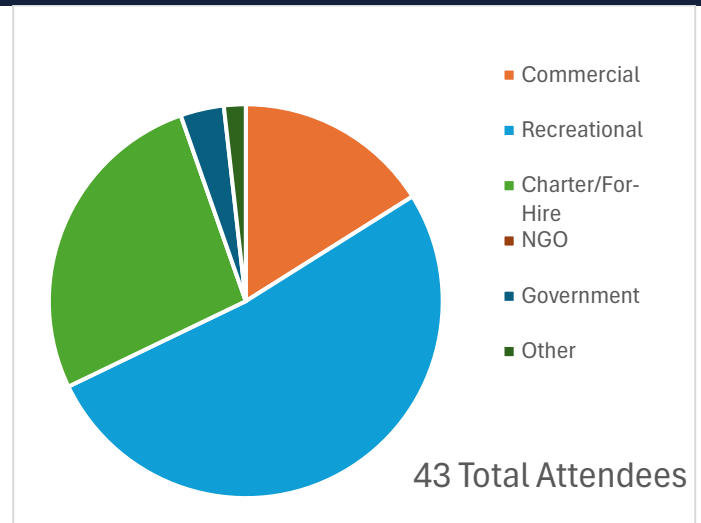
- Catch and release Atlantic king mackerel tournaments are not viable.
 - Someone will cheat, not able to gain extra sponsors, money still made on catch and release, volunteer run.
- Social media is resulting in an increase in tournaments, overall.

Other Discussion Points

- There needs to be better communication with fishery stakeholders, especially on science and the data that is going into stock assessments.
- Data collections are an important component of fisheries management. The data should be accessible to fishermen and the Council should focus on the science of fishing over the politics of fishing.
- Management decisions should be based on fishermen and the fisheries.
- User conflict between commercial and recreational sectors is increasing.

WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

APRIL 1, 2024 | NC DIVISION OF MARINE FISHERIES SOUTHERN DISTRICT OFFICE



Atlantic King Mackerel Management Changes

- Support for the current three-fish bag limit and other support for an increase to a recreational limit of five-fish per person.
- Support for the current 24-inch fork length minimum size limit.
 - Noted that tournaments are now catching larger king mackerel, especially as better technology has become available. While the king mackerel population is fine right now, this could become an issue in the future.
 - Tournament fishermen do not travel farther than normal in order to target larger king mackerel.
 - Noted that the commercial market in Wilmington is not interested in large king mackerel (over 40-inches fork length).
- Recommendation to allow fishermen with a commercial king mackerel permit to get a snapper grouper 225-permit.
 - Would it be possible to have a bycatch limit for snapper grouper species, similar to Flounder regulations in North Carolina.

Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- Support for a reduction in the 15-fish per person Spanish mackerel recreational bag limit.
 - Spanish mackerel do not freeze well.
 - Don't decrease the Spanish mackerel bag limit too much, it is important for the charter industry.
- Support for an increase in the 12-inch fork length minimum size limit for Spanish mackerel.
- Charter captains often require passengers to comply with stricter bag and size limits.

Other Recommended Management Changes

- King and Spanish mackerel management needs more regional consideration. Even in North Carolina there are three distinct regions with different fishing behaviors and priorities.
- Fisheries regulations that isolate species prevent fishermen from diversifying their catch. The regulations simply transfer effort from one species to another, which is negative for the health of all fish stocks.
- It is challenging to get a state commercial permit even with a federal commercial permit.

Fish Populations and Movement

- Both Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel populations appear to be doing well.
 - The Atlantic Spanish mackerel bite is slightly more consistent than the Atlantic king mackerel bite.
 - Fishermen report catching lots of small (juvenile) king mackerel mixed in with Spanish mackerel.
- Water temperature and availability of bait determine where and when you are going to see Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel in North Carolina.
 - Temperatures are changing with higher highs and lower lows. This trend in temperatures is cyclical and can be seen in fishermen logbooks.
- There has not been a significant change in where and when these two species arrive in North Carolina.
 - May and June and September through November are the primary months for Atlantic king mackerel.
 - One-two pound Atlantic Spanish mackerel are found inshore.
- It is important to consider how management changes may affect the way fish move and adapt.

Co-Occurring Species

- Shark depredation has become a significant issue in the Atlantic king mackerel fishery.
- There used to be big pods of bluefish, even more than Atlantic Spanish mackerel.
- Large populations of red snapper are seen when diving and current management needs to be revised based on improvements in the stock and high encounter rates.

Water Quality and Other Concerns

- Poor water quality and pollution are having a negative effect on fish stocks and associated fisheries, with inshore fisheries affected more than offshore fisheries.
 - Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel tend to stay away from beach when the water is polluted.
 - Beach renourishment is having negative effects on the food chain overall.
 - Algal blooms are occurring more often (multiple summers in a row).
 - Fishermen will look at water quality metrics such as chlorophyll to decide where to fish.
- Spanish mackerel fishing in the Cape Fear River is not what it used to be due to changes in salinity and water temperature.
- Seeing an increase in the number of Atlantic Spanish mackerel found with parasites.
- There is concern that offshore wind development will have negative effects on fish stocks, especially pelagic species like Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel.

Communities, Effort, and Adaptations

- All coastal communities in North Carolina should be a priority for Council outreach and engagement.
 - The following areas have mackerel fisheries: Outer Banks, Morehead City area, Long Bay/Onslow Bay, south of Frying Pan Shoals, Carolina Beach.
 - North of Hatteras and South of Hatteras are very different fisheries, in fact there are three distinct regions in North Carolina
 - It is important for the Council to understand how Atlantic king mackerel tournaments affect communities.
- Fishermen are adapting to changes in the fisheries by burning more fuel (traveling farther) and managing expectations from clients on for-hire trips. Many for-hire businesses have to change how they fish to target available fish, such as greater amberjack. These changes are due not just to the presence or absence of the fish species but also due to restrictive regulations.
 - As regulations increase, effort will continue to shift to different species.

Commercial Fishing Dynamics

- Commercial fishermen choose to fish for Atlantic king mackerel because it is easy to fish for in the fall and doesn't require traveling too far offshore. Fishermen choose to target Atlantic Spanish mackerel because it is a comparatively easy fishery to enter and there is a local market.
- The Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery primarily occurs in state waters. There used to be a substantial net fishery for Atlantic Spanish mackerel, but strict regulations have decreased participation.
 - Most commercial Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishermen have a federal Spanish mackerel permit in case they have to go into federal waters to fish or if the Council ever considers limited access.
 - When asked if the Council should consider limited access for the federal Spanish mackerel permit, attendees noted that the economy (cost of bait, fuel, keeping up with regulations, etc.) would likely regulate the number of people participating in the fishery.
 - There was also concern that limited access permits often result in prices that make entry a fishery cost prohibitive, especially if brokers get involved, preventing access to the ocean for future generations.
- Market prices in all fisheries can be highly variable and timing can make a big difference.
 - King mackerel prices have gotten better, but tournaments are landing larger fish that are lower quality which hurts the prices.
 - There needs to be better tracking of recreational tournament caught Atlantic king mackerel.
 - Diversity of catch is key for a fish house being able to make money, variety is better than 1,000 pounds of one fish.
- Fishermen interact with false albacore, sharks, barracuda, and amberjacks when fishing for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.

Recreational Fishing Dynamics

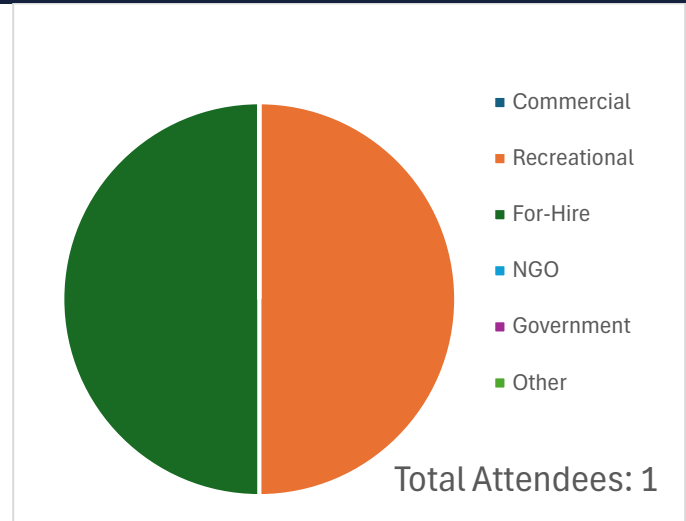
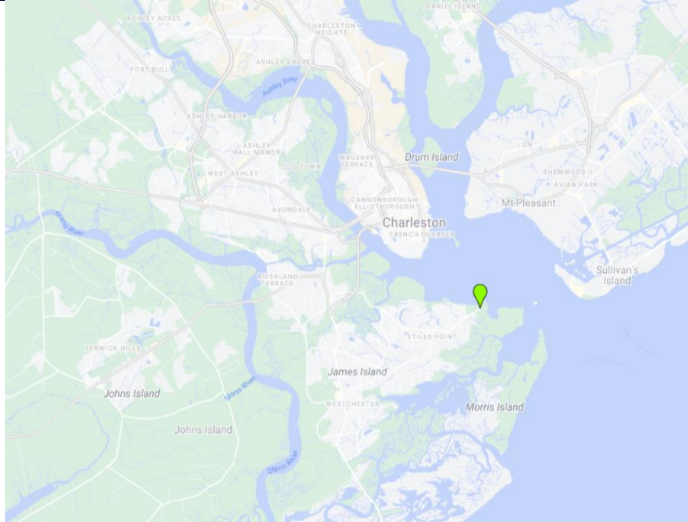
- Recreational fishermen target Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel because they are easy to catch and readily available. For the for-hire component, king and Spanish mackerel are good for clients because they are fun to catch. Both species are economically important.
 - Without Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel, for-hire businesses would be bankrupt. Atlantic Spanish mackerel is the most important weather fish, and it is easy on clients.
- The COVID pandemic caused an increase in recreational participation, but that effort is declining now.
 - Updates in technology are increasing success and resulting in more participation.
- Alternatively, the number of charter industry veterans is declining. The industry can be challenging to get into, and fishermen are not going offshore as much due to poor weather and the cost of gas.
- When asked about catch and release for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel, fishermen felt that it was definitely a component of the fishery – especially when utilizing light tackle.
 - Atlantic King mackerel release well, though tournaments make this harder.
 - Atlantic Spanish mackerel are tougher to release, they stress easier.
 - Fish with a hook in them are still able to feed and survive.
- For-hire captains ask their clients what they hope to catch, so trip targets can be client dependent.
 - When for-hire trips are targeting Atlantic Spanish mackerel, the vessel only keeps 25-30 fish (on a six-person trip) and then switch to other species.
 - Captains are seeing fewer “cooler trips” more “tourist trips.”
- Atlantic king mackerel tournaments are incredibly important to the local economy.
 - There can be a two-million-dollar boost for a two-day tournament and that economic boost moves throughout the community.
 - Tournament dates allow access for many participants, both inshore and offshore.
 - Catch and release would not work for these tournaments. The sale of tournament caught Atlantic king mackerel helps to fund community charities, such as those supporting artificial reefs.
 - Tournament sales have little recreational effect on the market and fishbowl tickets have been illegal in North Carolina for over 25 years.
- There has not been a significant change in how recreational fishermen are targeting Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel, but technology has improved live bait fishing, generally.
- Other species recreational fishermen interact with when fishing for Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel include cobia, false albacore, sharks, amberjacks, red snapper.
 - Red snapper abundance makes it challenging to target Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.

Other Discussion Points

- Education and communication from the Council and state agencies is incredibly important.
 - Clarity in how data is collected for king and Spanish mackerel and where it is available for stakeholders to view is important.
 - Communication on why the Council is making certain decisions.
- Stakeholder input should be better utilized in the management process.

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

OCTOBER 8, 2024 | SC DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES OUTDOOR CLASSROOM



Atlantic King and Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- Recommendation to keep Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel regulations the same.
 - It is uncommon to regularly catching 3 Atlantic king mackerel per person and usually keep no more than 10-Atlantic Spanish mackerel per person, usually less.
- The commercial Atlantic king mackerel permit is too challenging to purchase due to limited entry.
- Limited entry is not needed for the coastal migratory pelagics for-hire permit, the economy self-regulates the fishery and it should be as easy as possible for fishermen to stay legal.
 - Not too concerned about illegal behavior
 - Reporting is fine, but it needs to be more streamlined, including a repeat button, more general questions and better question tiering.
 - Economic questions on an annual basis and more as a sub-sample.
- Generally, there are too many permits for South Atlantic fisheries, and they need to be consolidated.

Environmental Conditions

- Atlantic king mackerel are targeted along the beach in the summer in the inlets (Broad River, Fort Sumter) and on the beach in the fall.
 - Summertime Atlantic king mackerel tournaments head offshore.
 - Not seeing fishermen go past the jetty as often in recent years.
- There has been no change in good weather days.

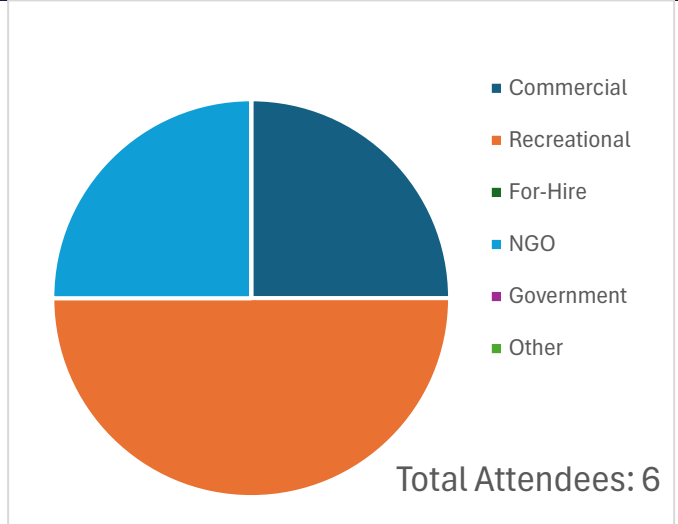
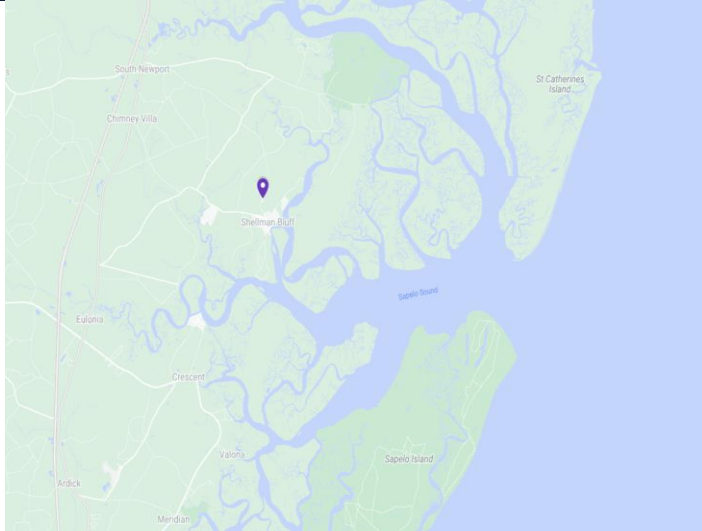
Fishery Dynamics

- For-hire businesses advertise using Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel (listed as species a client could possibly catch on a trip). Atlantic king mackerel are day makers or trophy fish, while Atlantic Spanish mackerel is for fun, family fishing.

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel are occasionally caught when bottom fishing and clients are happy with catch Atlantic Spanish mackerel.
- Tourists generally catch and release, unless they want to keep, but it is more about entertainment (80%) with the exception of Atlantic king mackerel for the meat.
- Don't get clients that are super picky in Charleston
- Recreational fishing for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel effort was higher during the COVID pandemic but has come back down (about 1/3 less).
 - This has also been driven by the economy.
- Other places along the Atlantic Coast (ex. Southport, North Carolina), you can run a business on Atlantic Spanish mackerel, but they are not as reliable in South Carolina.
- Atlantic Spanish mackerel release well (only 1/15 dead discard).
 - Best fishing practices are important to use as much as possible, but not all charter captains use them.
- Atlantic king mackerel fishing tournaments are important in South Carolina, examples include this Johns Island Yacht Club Fall Classic and the US Open.
 - Economy is a big driver in tournament participation.

TOWNSEND, GEORGIA

AUGUST 1, 2024 | SAPELO SALTWATER FISHING CLUB



Atlantic King and Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- The current bag limits and size limit for Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel don't need to change.
 - If a lower recreational bag limit is needed to avoid a shorter Atlantic Spanish mackerel season, it could be reduced to 10 per person or 30-45 fish per vessel.
- If latent commercial king mackerel permits were removed, fishermen would target Atlantic king mackerel just to hold onto the permit. Could separate the Gulf and South Atlantic commercial king mackerel permit but would need to consider fishermen who travel between both areas.

Environmental Conditions

- As water warms, fishermen are seeing fewer Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel.
 - Used to see a lot of Atlantic Spanish mackerel a few years ago, but around 2020 there was a switch to seeing fewer fish.
 - Atlantic King mackerel are seen farther offshore. Having to go into deeper water (100-feet or more) has increased the number of shark interactions and you have to move at least of mile once the sharks are around the vessel.
- There are lots of glass minnows close to shore, but no Atlantic Spanish mackerel, and no longer a spring run. There is less bait seen on the artificial reefs and do not see surface bait regularly and there is no variety.
- The environment is generally out of balance and all fisheries are affected by the prevalence of red snapper.

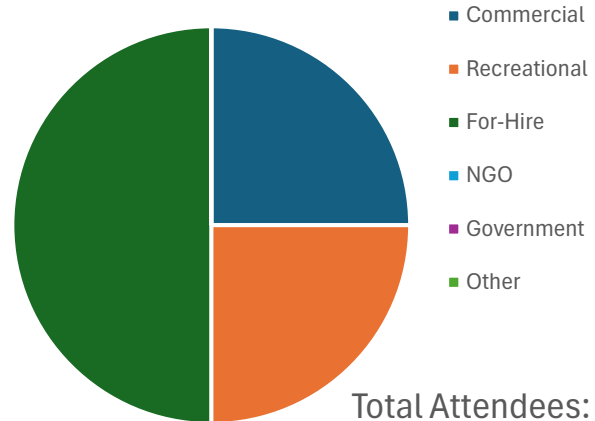
Fishery Dynamics

- Commercial fishermen are sending boats farther because fisheries have become hit or miss due to the environment and regulations.
- Most commercial fishermen in Georgia have a king mackerel permit, but they don't target them. Keep permit in the case that Atlantic king mackerel are around, and the price is high.

- The price for Atlantic king mackerel has increased in recent years. There has been a switch in effort from snapper to king mackerel.
- There was some concern about the role of commercial fishing in South Florida and increasing effort.
- Atlantic king mackerel tournaments in Georgia and in Florida are important to communities.
 - Value the competition in Atlantic king mackerel tournaments, they bring the community together. Popular in Florida because can fish nearshore and bring kids, however this is harder in Georgia.
 - It is important to have fish at the dock for experience. Loss of tournament sales would not have a huge impact because fewer boats are participating. However, charity needs all the money they can get from the tournament sales.
 - Georgia has six tournaments, plus local.
 - There is participation by commercial fishermen in tournaments. If they catch a large enough fish to win, they will enter it, but if not can sell days catch.
 - Sailfish tournaments with meat division where Atlantic king mackerel are caught.
 - Spanish mackerel is not used as bait for billfish (not as many in Georgia anymore).
- For-hire and private recreational fishermen used to target mackerel because they had easy access and they are exciting to catch, but sharks have lowered trip satisfaction and now king mackerel are targeted a lot less.
 - In recreational fishing the value is in the number of trips and flexibility of when those trips can be taken.
 - Catch and release practices are already being used in Georgia.
- When fishing for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel, fishermen are encountering greater amberjacks, barracuda, and almaco jacks.

ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA

SEPTEMBER 30, 2024 | WILLIE GALIMORE COMMUNITY CENTER



Atlantic King and Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- The Atlantic king mackerel commercial trip limit system should stay status quo.
 - Need to be able to fish when the weather is good (support for 100-fish in the winter)
 - The environment is the main driver of changes in landings and changing regulations won't help fishermen.
- Fishermen felt that it was not necessary to pull latent commercial king mackerel permits as it ultimately would not achieve any goals of the fishery.
 - Currently, \$12,000-\$15,000 for a commercial king mackerel permit.
- When asked how they felt about combining the commercial king mackerel and Spanish mackerel permits or alternatively splitting the permits by migratory group, fishermen were not immediately against the idea but did express concerns.
 - There was concern about possible permit speculation if the commercial permits were split.
 - Need to consider how different south Florida is from the rest of the Gulf and South Atlantic. Possibly a separate permit?
- Doing away with open access for-hire coastal migratory pelagics permit would help the Atlantic king mackerel stock.
 - Limited entry would be a better mechanism to collect information and information on Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel is desperately needed.
 - It is important to protect those that have been in the industry for a long time and as a "stick" to non-reporting. Limited entry would professionalize the fleet.
 - Sector separation would be better for for-hire business and limited entry is the first step.
 - The South Atlantic Council could create a way to allow new for-hire permit entry.
- Enforceability of Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel regulations is critical.
- A tag system for recreational reporting could work for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel as long as there were plenty of tags.

Environmental Conditions

- Environmental changes are having an effect on the Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel fisheries.
 - Temperatures have been increasing, and the area has been seeing warmer winters. Cold water is what drives king mackerel and Spanish mackerel.
 - Commercial fishermen are looking to travel north (northern Florida, southern Georgia) to look for Atlantic king mackerel.
- Fishermen are catching fewer fish, they stay up north and are not running as far offshore (20-30 miles in Daytona, 30-40 miles in St. Augustine).
 - The spring fishery for Atlantic king mackerel (March) is not what it was years ago.
 - Last year there was a decent season in Daytona, but this year fishermen had to go to Sebastian. Atlantic king mackerel don't stay anymore. There were ten to twelve good fishing years in Sebastian, but it is no longer the major area.
 - These changes might be cyclical.
- The center of abundance might be changing, and fishermen were interested in understanding where the mixing zone between the Gulf migratory stock and Atlantic migratory stock was located now.
 - It is thought that northern Florida in the winter is the Atlantic stock and south of Daytona, Florida is still a mixing zone.
- Used to see large Atlantic king mackerel inshore, but that changed this year. This year was a fluke or hopefully just a short-term change.
- Water quality is an issue in Florida. Beach renourishment muddies the waters and thermoclines have increased in recent years.

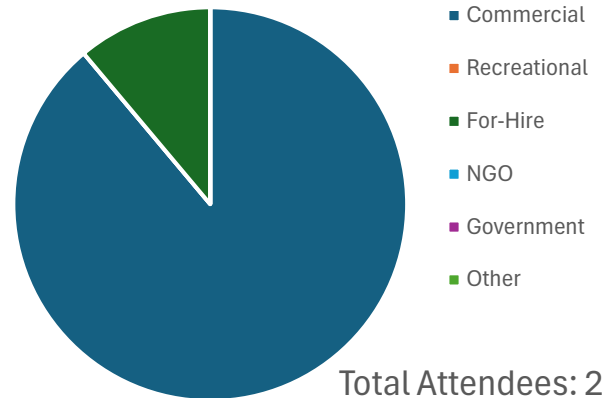
Fishery Dynamics

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel is mostly bycatch in this area.
 - Commercially they are just not targeted as much anymore in Northern Florida.
- Atlantic king mackerel are currently \$5.25 to \$5.50 per pound, which is high.
 - The price has helped keep Atlantic king mackerel fishermen stable and make up for the fewer trips.
 - The fish are primarily being sold to Canada
- There are not as many traveling fishermen (Gulf to Atlantic) anymore, though historically this was a common practice.
- Changes in for-hire landings due to effort shift in the consumer. Clients are not as interested in fishing for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel, which is a change from the historic preference for Atlantic king mackerel.
 - There are still some beach charters, but you can no longer rely on fishing for Atlantic king mackerel.
 - Small boat charters will still target Atlantic king mackerel and they are important to that fleet.
 - These boats will run multiple half day trips in a day and clients often don't want to keep fish.
- Private recreational fishermen still beach fish for king mackerel (within 3 miles) because it is easy fishing for families.

- Atlantic king mackerel tournaments are still a big part of recreational fishing in Florida. It is an easy and accessible fishery, and you can use small boats (large boats do not have an advantage). It is a family event for the community.
 - King Mackerel Kickoff (beach tournament in July), Jacksonville tournament brings in 300 boats. Now there are 12 tournaments in Northeast Florida alone with 600-800 anglers.
 - Tournaments will land a range of sizes, both large and small (aggregate poundage awards). Sebastian and Cocoa have larger Atlantic king mackerel than anywhere else.
 - Larger king mackerel (30-40 pounds) are hard to catch due to shark depredation.
 - The tournament record for years was 52 pounds, last year's record was 55 pounds.
 - Tournament fish are donated and money from Safe Harbor sale is donated to a tournament charity (not to tournament operations).
 - Loss of tournament sales would not negatively impact tournaments, but they are making \$10,000 - \$15,000 donations to charity.
 - Jacksonville University researchers will take samples and conduct research with tournament fish.
 - Graduate research on king mackerel migration patterns.
- Most important thing for the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries is research and monitoring. Research should be conducted to understand stock fluctuations (is it an environmental issue or a stock issue).

COCOA, FLORIDA

OCTOBER 1, 2024 | CITY OF COCOA CIVIC CENTER



Atlantic King Mackerel Management Changes

- It is not currently necessary to address latent commercial king mackerel permits. It is important to help younger generations get into the fishery and to keep permit value.
- Generally, the current regulations for Atlantic king mackerel are acceptable.
 - Changes in commercial trip limits can affect the market. Some fishermen thought the South Atlantic Council could consider a simpler trip limit system with less fluctuation, so fishermen know what price they might get when they bring fish to the dock.
 - For the summer quota, the 75-fish limit would work for the Canaveral area. Possibly a 100-fish limit on a 2-day trip or 100-fish limit all year long would help stabilize the market.
 - When the price drops, some fish houses will freeze Atlantic king mackerel.
 - The current 100-fish limit in the winter is very important for the Sebastian and northward.
 - It wasn't thought that a decrease in the recreational bag limit was needed, but charter vessels would be okay with a two fish per person bag limit.
 - There was some debate among fishermen regarding what was better for the commercial fishery, a per trip limit vs. daily limit with a higher poundage.
- There was concern expressed about the amount of king mackerel harvest from roller-rigs that operate in the Florida Keys (Gulf migratory group king mackerel).

Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- Consider changing from a daily Atlantic Spanish mackerel limit to a trip limit (3x a day). Or a daily limit that is higher than 3,500 pounds, possibly 5,000 pounds per day or maybe even 7,500 pounds.
- Concern about inequities between the Atlantic Spanish mackerel gill net fishery (federal waters) and cast net fishery (state waters). All catch comes off of the federal annual catch limit regardless of where it was caught.

- There should be an observer requirement for cast nets that operate in state waters to fair to gill nets vessels that operate in federal waters and have an observer requirement.
- Gill net fishermen are not able to benefit from the 500-pound bycatch limit like cast net fishermen.
 - The bycatch limit could be removed. The original rationale was related to roller rigs fishing for Atlantic Spanish mackerel, where today it is cast net fishery, which operates differently.
- Gill net fishermen would like to be able to fish two nets that are both 3.5-inches mesh size, not different by 0.25-inches. Cast net fishermen should be required to utilize a specific mesh size.
- There needs to be consistency in state and federal regulations for Atlantic Spanish mackerel, especially.
 - The open access commercial permit is a doorway for people to show up when fishing is good. The permit needs to be required in state and federal waters.

Fish Populations and Movement

- When and where Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel are arriving has changed in recent years throughout central Florida. It is thought that a lot of these changes are environmentally driven.
 - Fish are arriving later in the calendar year and fishermen are having to wait until much later to target mackerel.
 - Fish stay away from areas where they used to be, for example Atlantic Spanish mackerel and larger fish are not coming inshore as much anymore. When offshore the fish don't school up as much as they do when they are closer inshore.
 - As a result of these changes, fishermen are having to shift where and when they fish.
 - Cold fronts aren't there to push the fish south.
- The number of bad weather days is increasing, significant effecting that amount of effort fishermen are able to give to fisheries in general.
 - In December and January, there used to be big spaces between fronts for fishermen to get on the water. Now, access has become significantly more difficult.
 - The number of storms is increasing and the water changes post-storm, possibly due to pollution, but fish tend to avoid muddy waters.
- There are questions about where the mixing zone is located as fish are staying more north, especially Atlantic Spanish mackerel. It seems like there might be less of a mixing zone in the Cocoa area than their used to be or Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel migratory groups are mixing at a different time.

Co-Occurring Species

- Shark depredation is a significant issue in the Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel fishery. It has become impossible to bring in larger mackerels because of sharks.
 - When Atlantic king mackerel quotas are not met, it can be because a lot of the targeted fish are depredated on by sharks. Live bait fishermen are not able to land the large Atlantic king mackerel anymore because of sharks.
 - There should be some research on how to utilize sharks and allow more harvest. Bull sharks are very aggressive and could be marketed.

- The shark fin ban has caused problems.
- Are the sharks protecting Atlantic king mackerel because people won't fish those areas anymore?

Water Quality and Other Concerns

- Water quality and pollution of the waterways in Florida was a big concern for fishermen.
 - The water that comes out of the inlets (freshwater discharges) affects the availability of Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.
 - Specific concerns mentioned for the St. John River and St. Lucie River areas.
 - Fishermen are now having to rely on phone applications that show sediments, pollutions, etc. to determine where to fish.
 - Cruise ship activity affects water quality. During the pandemic, when cruise ships were no operating, water quality improved.
 - There needs to be more research effort put toward remedying water quality issues in Florida.
- Rocket launches are increasing in frequency and causing significant harm to the fishing industry, generally, including for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.
 - While the associated closures are temporary, they affect access to a public resource and fishermen often have to postpone when they are fishing. These closures are especially impactful when good weather days are decreasing in frequency.
 - The US Coast Guard has new app, but fishermen are often not notified of schedule launches and changes.
- Dredging operations and beach renourishment efforts are having an effect on water quality as well as changing the sea bottom.
 - From Stuart to Daytona the shell bottom has become muddy, resulting in a change in fauna.
 - Algae "mud" comes up in fishermen's nets.
- Lack of working waterfronts and dockage an issue. The South Atlantic Council needs to get more involved in local working waterfront issues.

Commercial Dynamics

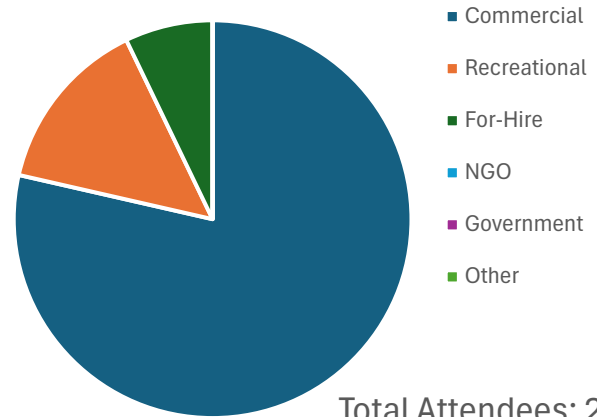
- Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel is some of the last great fisheries in Florida where commercial fishermen can still make money.
 - Many Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel are multi-generation fishermen.
 - However, not seeing younger fishermen getting into the fishery.
 - Atlantic Spanish mackerel is the only fishery that is still available and easy to enter.
 - In both fisheries you can still get sufficient poundage across the docks.
- The Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel price per pound is sensitive to the number of fish on the market. Fishermen never know what price they might get when they return from the dockage. Atlantic Spanish are getting \$0.35-0.50 per pound and up to \$1.50 for medium fish.
 - The price is good right now (\$5.40/pound) because fishermen are catching fewer fish. However, the economy and fuel cost demand higher prices.

- If the price of Atlantic king mackerel goes too high, it competes with other kinds of protein.
 - There needs to be more marketing for Atlantic king mackerel, especially locally. Don't want too many fish at one time but do want to increase the market when the fish are available.
 - Atlantic King mackerel sells a lot of other fish because you can add it to a package. Atlantic king mackerel sells for \$6.00-8.00 pound at the market.
 - Imports from Trinidad, Mexico, Brazil are poor quality and compete with mackerel as a seafood (ex. imported shrimp vs. fresh Atlantic king mackerel).
 - Lent market is the strongest, generally, but not last year.
 - You can't base management on the market. It is too variable and fish are being brought in from too many different locations.
 - Need the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel to look at the market: when to open and close, reduce quotas, address market strategies.
 - Alternatively, there are too many variables, want the quota and to let individual fishermen determine when they fish because fishing patterns are changing, depths, etc.
- It is important for the South Atlantic Council to understand that the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery is different than the Atlantic king mackerel fishery.
- There are fewer fishermen traveling both North/South and East/West, most of the effort is in central Florida. Less travel because of challenges with the effort needed to maintain a business and a family.
 - The Gulf king mackerel are not being seen anymore and so fishermen in Florida are not competing with the fishermen in Louisiana as much as they were years ago.
 - Gulf and Florida Keys fisheries can drop the price and when fish are unavailable in the Atlantic, fish houses will buy from the Gulf.
- Atlantic King and Spanish mackerel sold up north (Canada, Chicago, Minnesota).
- Overall, the size of commercially caught Atlantic king mackerel has increased (around 3lbs) and this is cyclical. The size of recreationally caught Atlantic king mackerel has decreased, but this is driven by a switch due to sharks.
- Private recreational reporting is needed. There is a lot of concern about the accuracy of current methods (MRIP and SEFHIER).
 - More port samplers will result in better information.
- SEFHIER is too time consuming, not everyone running a for-hire trip is the owner/operator of the business. Employees are less likely to fill out reports because it is not their permit. Not all vessels have deckhands and there is not enough time to report at the dock.
- Limited entry is needed for the for-hire coastal migratory pelagics permit. There are too many people in the industry and trips are being run in dangerous conditions.
 - Alternatively, some attendees felt that the economy serves as limited entry. Limited entry just drives the cost of permits, and it becomes a commodity, can't make money back.
 - Fishermen should be required to pass a course to get a for-hire permit.
 - An apprenticeship program to professionalize the fleet and invest in the fishery.

- Managers need to do a better job of organizing fishermen and providing information on how to have their voices heard. There is mistrust among fishermen that keeps them away from interacting with management.
 - The South Atlantic Council can gain trust back by listening to fishermen and acting on their information.

STUART, FLORIDA

OCTOBER 2, 2024 | THE BANYAN ROOM



Atlantic King Mackerel Management Changes

- Atlantic king mackerel commercial trip limits should stay status quo but move back to a weight limit instead of a number of fish limit, with some leeway with weight.
 - Need to retain a higher trip limit so you can make money on good weather days, but don't want the price to decrease.
 - At the 50-fish limit, fishermen are getting nicer fish. 75-fish limit, you can have both "limit days" and fishing days, depending on weather and sharks. At the 100-fish limit the price goes down.
 - Some fishermen felt that the commercial trip limit could remain at 75-fish year-round (or 750 pounds).
- There are fewer latent commercial king mackerel permits now and the South Atlantic Council should consider a 2-for-1 system.
 - A single permit costs about \$17,000-25,000, which is a comparably small investment.

Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- The Atlantic Spanish mackerel limit could be modified to be 1,500 pounds. It might stabilize the fishery and still allow for sufficient harvest.
 - The 500-pounds bycatch limit after a closure in federal waters for commercial Atlantic Spanish mackerel is absolutely critical. Fish are worth more money when the trip limit is lower.
- Consider changing the required gillnet mesh to 3.25-inches or 3 1/8-inches. Smaller mesh is thrown near the end of the season.
 - Not targeting fish that are less than one pound because fish of that size are not as marketable.
- Limited entry is needed for the commercial Spanish mackerel permit and/or an endorsement for the gill net component of the fishery.

- This is needed because if there is one good year fishermen will jump into the fishery. Even fishermen from western Florida will move over when the fishing is good.
- An apprentice system program could allow younger fishermen entry into the fishery.
- There should be an income (from commercial fishing) requirement to get a permit. There are too many fishermen in Florida because permits are easy to purchase.
 - \$25,000 of income from commercial fishing to receive a federal permit. Fishermen should evolve with the fishery and full-time fishermen would be able to meet this requirement.
- The limited entry permit would need to be required in state waters in addition to federal waters.
- There are only three to five gillnet boats left, it is a very regulated fishery. Need state water boats (cast nets) to meet the same regulations.
- There is an increasing demand for bait mackerel fishery and many fishermen don't have federal permits, just the special products license required in state waters.

Other Recommended Management Changes

- The South Atlantic Council needs to manage the entire fishery, everything is interrelated. Management needs to take a more holistic view of the ecosystem.
- There there needs to be a law enforcement system for the for-hire sector.
- Fish houses could be required to take sharks. There is no shortage of sharks and very little commercial fishing pressure, especially on sandbar sharks.
- Consider a commercial federal waters season for goliath grouper.
- There should be a logbook entry for damaged discards specifically due to depredation.

Fish Population and Movement

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel used to over winter in the Stuart area, the fishery improved after the net ban, fish used to be in Salerno, but over the last four-five years fish stay north (Vero Cove) and only come down during cold fronts.
 - Cooler winters had all of the Atlantic and Gulf migratory fish off of Jupiter at the same time but that is not happening anymore.
- Fishermen can't count on the runs of Atlantic Spanish mackerel that they used to be able to rely on, especially in the summer.
 - The fishery has become so uncertain that fishermen have to moved to smaller (trailer) vessels.
- Atlantic Spanish mackerel are more spread out now and are not schooling up together like did historically.
- Recently, fishermen have been seeing lots of small fish (right at the size limit) signaling good recruitment for Atlantic Spanish mackerel. Fish abundance is adequate but there aren't consistently available
- The range of Atlantic king mackerel is extending to the north. There were mixed opinions on whether the range was shifting or expanding.
- Atlantic king mackerel is a resilient fishery that often goes through cycles.
- Fishable days have decreased drastically due to weather, last year with El Nino there were only 15 days with good weather windows.

Co-occurring Species

- Commercial dive boats, many that run up to four trips per day are increasing issues with shark depredation causing significant harm to the Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel fishing industry. Sharks have learned that boats mean access to food.
 - Commercial fishermen are foregoing half their income to sharks. The for-hire industry is having to completely change target species to avoid sharks.
 - This issue happens both inshore and offshore and affects both hook and line fishermen and net fishermen.
 - The effect of depredation needs to be considered in effort for stock assessments.
 - Fishermen were interested in seeing an economic impact study on how sharks are affecting South Atlantic fisheries.
- There is some bycatch of snapper grouper species when targeting Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.
 - Goliath grouper depredation is also a problem in the Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel fisheries.

Water Quality and Other Concerns

- Freshwater releases, dredging activity, and beach renourishment are all negatively affecting water quality.
 - Dredging and beach renourishment is making water turbid driving fish away from the area.
 - Freshwater releases push the fish offshore into more habitable water.
 - This is pushing fishermen into federal waters and not all realize that they need a federal permit.
- The health of estuaries is very important nursery areas that are being lost due to coastal development and pollution.
- Infrastructure is limiting and the cost to move (drive) to where fish are located can be a challenge. For example, there are tons of fish in the Florida Keys, but it is too expensive to keep a vessel in the Keys.

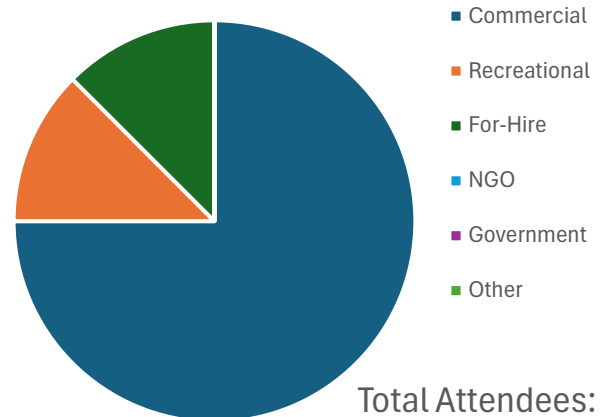
Fishery Dynamics

- Fishermen participate in the Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel fisheries because they are multigenerational fishermen, the Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel fisheries are still efficient, high-volume fisheries with the biggest runs of fish.
 - Despite the strength of the mackerel fisheries, it is still challenging to make a living out of commercial fishing.
- Both the Atlantic king mackerel and Spanish mackerel markets can be volatile based on the number of fish on market at a given time.
 - Historically, during the May run of fish, everyone would jump into the fisheries and the price would decrease. However, in recent years there hasn't been the amount of fish anymore and the increase in price has obscured this fact. Used to have to work twice as hard to make half the money.
 - Atlantic king mackerel tournament sales decrease price and there is not enough law enforcement to ensure sold fish are treated legally. There are three or more tournaments each week.
 - There are only three or four buyers in the area that compete with each other (positive).

- Fishermen used to be able to wait for the price to increase, but mackerel have become so unpredictable that fishermen have to fish when the fish are available.
- Commercial fishing in state waters is increasing, generally.
- Cast netting for Atlantic Spanish mackerel has become challenging because the fish are not schooling up inshore anymore. Three miles is too deep to cast net, and the fish are not staying still. The smaller Atlantic Spanish mackerel are moving north while larger fish are staying in “the hole.”
- There has not been an increase private recreational effort for Atlantic Spanish mackerel. Private recreational anglers only target Atlantic Spanish mackerel when coming back from an offshore trip.
 - Alternatively, some fishermen felt there had been an increase in recreational boats and electronics were making them more efficient fishermen.
 - However, there is a lot of money in South Florida, so recreational fishermen can afford to buy a federal permit for higher catch limits.
- The South Atlantic Council needs to recognize the ability to monitor the private recreational fishery.
 - There was concern about bad data (MRIP FES) and it negatively affecting sector allocations.
 - Private recreational reporting is needed, and it will be important for the South Atlantic Council to hold recreational fishermen accountable and get accurate data.
- The number of fish reported is not reflective of stock condition, but other issues with getting on the water.
 - The new stock assessment does not reflect the reality of what is happening with the Atlantic Spanish mackerel stock on the water.

LAKE WORTH, FLORIDA

OCTOBER 3, 2024 | PALM BEACH LIBRARY – LANTANA ROAD BRANCH



Atlantic King and Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- No changes to king mackerel regulations, so the opportunity to catch remains when the fish are available.
 - Recommend moving to a poundage commercial trip limit as opposed to a number of fish limit. It is easier for enforcement.
 - 100-fish trip commercial trip limit is good for the winter, with fewer fishable days.
- For Atlantic Spanish mackerel, the commercial trip limit could be lowered from 3,500 pounds to 1,750 or 1,500 pounds year-round.
 - 3,500-pounds is dangerous on a smaller boat.
 - A consistent trip limit could result in a more consistent price at the dock.
 - The 500-pound bycatch limit is not enough to make a trip worthwhile, but it is important to keep this limit in place in the event federal waters close to harvest.
- The commercial Spanish mackerel permit needs to be limited access and required in state waters.
 - Fishing is occurring in federal waters from unpermitted vessels. This is due to a lack of knowledge and enforcement.
 - There could be multiple ways to determine permit eligibility, such as a percentage of income from commercial fishing or catch history over a set number of years – maybe multiple ways to qualify.
- There was no desire to put the commercial king mackerel permit under a two-for-one requirement as not all current permits are even fishing.
- The current commercial permitting structure for selling fish makes it challenging to sell to non-dealers.
- Limited-entry for the for-hire coastal migratory pelagics permit is needed and a tag system for recreational harvest or tournaments should be considered.

Environmental Conditions

- Water quality and freshwater discharge is a significant issue along the Florida coast. Recent years have been worse than the previous five-years and freshwater discharge is affecting waters all the way out to 150-feet.

- In addition to freshwater discharge, beach renourishment is creating coffee-colored water and both Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel will move offshore when this happens.
 - Dredge barges are in all the inlets and grass no longer grows.
 - Jupiter to the Hobe Sound, dredging has destroyed the bottom and dredges are pulling sand even one mile off of the beach.
- In Boynton Beach, there has been less bait available in recent years. Fishermen are no longer seeing big runs of mullet and the demand for live bait is increasing.
 - The commercial fleet has moved away from Boynton Beach, there used to have a spring run, but it is gone.
 - Fishermen have seen more mullet this year, but not other live bait species.
- Fishermen are seeing more thermoclines and more cold water in the summer due to upwellings and warmer water in the winter when the tide is running south.
- The feeding of sharks in federal waters as part of ecotourism is significantly increasing incidence of shark depredation.
 - Dive boats will come to the dock to get fish carcasses from fishermen.
 - There is no market for the shark fishery anymore due to regulations.

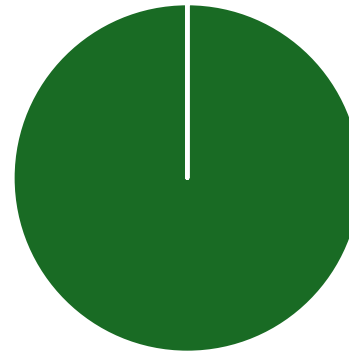
Fishery Dynamics

- In the past few years you have seen a decrease in the number of commercial fishermen and an increase in the number of recreational fishermen.
 - There are more recreational vessels on the water now, especially since COVID. These are often inexperienced anglers and there needs to be some type of education program.
 - Seeing improper handling techniques, especially with Atlantic Spanish mackerel, and social media is increasing the prevalence of these techniques.
 - There was concern about the lack of accountability for the private recreational sector.
 - An increase in technology is leading to more efficient fishing.
 - Commercial fishermen don't want to fish weekends because of the number private recreational fishermen as well as fishing tournaments.
- It is challenging to make a living as a full-time commercial fisherman. Fishermen are having to travel much more and fish for all species. Have to be a portfolio fishermen, you can no longer specialize in a fishery.
 - It is important for the South Atlantic Council to understand that removing one fishery just results in more pressure on another fishery.
- Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel are the only accessible and reliable fisheries left for for-hire businesses, so you are seeing an increase in effort.
 - For-hire businesses are changing what they are targeting due to fewer available species.
 - Now going after deep water species like tilefish.
 - There is an increase in for-hire effort on Atlantic king mackerel because it is challenging to catch dolphin.
- Atlantic king mackerel is not a good candidate for a catch and release fish, especially with the increase in shark depredation.

- Enforcement doesn't always know the regulations. Generally, there is not enough enforcement in the Boynton Beach and Sebastian areas.
- It is important to ensure that Atlantic king mackerel sold as a part of a state-permitted tournament are removed from the recreational annual catch limit.
 - West Palm Beach Fishing Club is opting not to host any Atlantic king mackerel tournaments in 2025 due to the population of available fish. They no longer work with the sale/donation of fish, fishermen just don't keep extra fish or may choose to donate on their own.
 - It is important to ensure that fish are not wasted.
 - There was some concern about tournaments targeting large female Atlantic king mackerel.
 - Law enforcement is needed at inlets and for tournament sales.
- There has been more demand for Atlantic king mackerel, so the price has been high (\$5/lbs.) However, everything is more expensive now, especially fuel.
 - There is not a market locally for Atlantic king or Spanish mackerel. Small local restaurants may be more interested in Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel, but they are not caught in enough volume to be sustainable, and fishermen can't be driving everywhere to deliver fish
 - High-end restaurants want snapper grouper.
 - However, there are specialized markets in areas like New York and San Francisco for fish like Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.
 - There is a difference in fish quality between part-time and full-time commercial fishermen. Fish houses will take the lower quality fish, and it drops the price.

NEW ENGLAND

MAY 14-16, 2024 | VIA WEBINAR ONLY



Attendees: 3

Atlantic King and Spanish Mackerel Management Changes

- There are currently no regulations in the New England area specific to Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel. Not sure fishermen even know that there are regulations in New York waters.
- Data collection systems are not currently in place to track landings, but could start with *de minimus* status for states along the leading edge of the Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel ranges.
 - Don't want New England to be the wild west, but there not currently any out of control harvest.
 - There are no regulations needed now, but it will be important to be proactive with regulations since there can often be a time lag between an issue being identified, management measures being implemented and communicated.
- If the South Atlantic Council is going to continue to manage outside of their region, it will be important to communicate to those regions.
- Overall, management is not needed in New England and the South Atlantic Council should focus on management needs in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Environmental Conditions

- Atlantic Spanish mackerel and king mackerel were sporadic in the past, but over last seven years have become more common along Buzzards Bay and mid-Cape Cod.
 - Atlantic Spanish mackerel are seen more regularly than Atlantic king mackerel (all years vs. some years).
- When there are concentrations of bay anchovies in late-August and early-September, you are likely to see more Atlantic Spanish mackerel. They are also found mixed in with false albacore and bonitos.
 - 15 years ago, you wouldn't start booking for-hire trips for false albacore before late-September, but it is getting easier to find warmer water and now start ahead of Labor Day.
- When the water temperature hits between 78 and 81 degrees Fahrenheit and there is a good run of juvenile menhaden, you will find Atlantic king mackerel.
- There are only a few locations where you can find Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.

- Saltwater ponds (mouths, inlets, estuaries) not in more than 35-feet of water.

Fishery Dynamics

- For-hire trips will spend time fishing for Atlantic Spanish mackerel when they are around because they are different from the normal catch, but they are never running specific mackerel trips.
 - Atlantic Spanish mackerel presents another food and take-home opportunity when people are not able to keep other good eating species such as stripers and sea bass.
 - The focus remains on false albacore, bonito, and stripers (when available) but Atlantic Spanish mackerel are an exciting catch, signals the start of hardtail season.
- For-hire fishing in New England is more experience based than focused on meat, especially when targeting false albacore and bonito. Fish are not often kept, but do keep Atlantic Spanish mackerel with some frequency.
- Using live tackle casting, chasing the feed, and some fly gear (though this is less common). There is some live bait fishing when targeting stripers.