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**Re: FB26-002: Commercial Closure in Federal Waters for Atlantic Migratory Group Spanish Mackerel Southern Zone on February 7, 2026**

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**From** Ben Hartig <mackattackben@att.net>

**Date** Tue 2/3/2026 11:14 AM

**To** NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region <sero.noaafisheries@public.govdelivery.com>; McCawley, Jessica <jessica.mccawley@myfwc.com>; John Carmichael <John.Carmichael@safmc.net>; Andy Strelcheck <andy.strelcheck@noaa.gov>; Christina Wiegand <christina.wiegand@safmc.net>

As a person that has been instrumental in developing the current commercial management regulations for Spanish mackerel I am extremely disappointed in the way that SERO has been managing this important fishery. The trip limit step downs are there for a reason, to extend the season at a catch level that is still economically feasible for the current fleet structure to still make trips. Most mackerel boats fish with a captain and 2 crew members and at the 1500 pound level can still support this level of effort as the price normally increases with the drop in production. This season the 1500 pound step down did not happen again, and this has been a recurring problem in this fishery when the stock is capable of withstanding increased production. Additionally, the 240,000 pounds that we responsibly set aside for a 500 pound trip limit at the end of the season will not be available this season due to your inability to stop the fishery before the total quota was caught. From your actions this year and in the past it is evident that the NMFS does not care enough about this fishery to monitor it according to the regulatory framework set by law jointly by the SA Council and the NMFS. This does not happen in any other fishery you monitor in the SE. Fishermen were looking at the ACL page over the past 6 weeks waiting for the fishery to meet the 1500 pound step down. I received a number of calls asking why the trip limit was not reduced at 75% and if they could see that 75% of the quota caught, the people responsible for monitoring this fishery certainly could. My answer to them was that by past and current actions by the NMFS it is evident that they do not care enough about the people or the regulations in this critically important fishery to the fishermen of SE Florida. I cannot see any reason why this continues to happen as there aren't any other fisheries in the SE that are approaching closures or step downs at this time of the year. Please take the necessary steps to monitor this fishery in the future by the regulatory framework currently in place.

Sincerely, Ben C Hartig  
Served 15 years on the SAFMC

On Monday, February 2, 2026 at 05:15:57 PM EST, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region <sero.noaafisheries@public.govdelivery.com> wrote:

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**ISSUE DATE:** February 2, 2026

**FB26-002**

**CONTACT:** Mary Vara, Sustainable Fisheries, mary.vara@noaa.gov, 727-824-5305

# Commercial Closure in Federal Waters for Atlantic Migratory Group Spanish Mackerel Southern Zone on February 7, 2026

## What/When:

- Commercial harvest of Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in the Atlantic southern zone is closed, effective **6:00 a.m., local time, on February 7, 2026**, and will open on March 1, 2026, for the March 2026 through February 2027 fishing season.
- The Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in the Atlantic southern zone includes federal waters off the states of South Carolina, Georgia, and the east coast of Florida. The boundary for the southern zone is the Atlantic exclusive economic zone from the North Carolina/South Carolina border to the Monroe/Miami-Dade Counties, Florida, border.
- During the commercial closure, harvest or possession of Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in or from the Atlantic southern zone is limited to the recreational bag and possession limits while the recreational sector is open.

## Why This Closure Is Happening:

Commercial landings data indicate that commercial landings for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in the Atlantic southern zone are projected to reach the commercial quota. According to the accountability measure, harvest must close to prevent the quota from being exceeded.

## After the Closure:

- The prohibition on sale or purchase during a closure for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in the Atlantic southern zone does not apply to fish that were harvested, landed ashore, and sold prior to **6:00 a.m., local time, February 7, 2026**, and were held in cold storage by a dealer or processor.
- During the closure, a person on board a vessel that has been issued a valid Federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for coastal migratory pelagic fish may continue to retain, but not sell or purchase, Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in the Atlantic southern zone under the recreational bag and possession limits, as long as the recreational sector is open.

This bulletin provides only a summary of the existing regulations. Full regulations can be found in the *Federal Register* or at <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-VI/part-622#subpart-Q>.

# Sign Up for Text Message Alerts

Our Text Message Alert Program allows you to receive important fishery related alerts via text message (SMS). Standard message and data rates may apply. You may opt-out at any time. Text alerts you may receive include immediate fishery openings and closures and any significant changes to fishing regulations that happen quickly.

Sign up for one or more of the fisheries-related alerts below by texting the following to **888777**:

- Gulf of America (formerly Gulf of Mexico) Recreational: Text **GULFRECFISH**
- Gulf of America Commercial: Text **GULFCOMMFISH**
- South Atlantic Recreational: Text **SATLRECFISH**
- South Atlantic Commercial: Text **SATLCOMMFISH**
- Caribbean: Text **CARIBFISH**

## [Quick Glance Contact List for the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office](#)

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## Permits Mailbox

The Permits Office in St. Petersburg, Florida now has a Permits mailbox in the front lobby (263 13th Ave. South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701). You can now drop off original permits for permit transfers. Envelopes with information labels will be provided so that your documents can be attached to the correct application. The mailbox will be checked daily. For more information contact the Permits Office at (877) 376-4877.

## Other Contacts

**Media:** Allison Garrett (727) 551-5750

**Recreational Fishing Coordinator:** Sean Meehan (727) 385-5202

Join us every other Friday on NOAA Fisheries Instagram for *Rec Fish Friday*

[NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office](#) (727) 824-5301



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