

Mackerel Committee Report
April 17, 2018
Dr. Tom Frazer – Chair

CMP Amendment 31

Staff provided a review of CMP Amendment 31, which addresses the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (SAFMC) request to withdraw the Atlantic migratory group of cobia (Atlantic cobia) from the joint fishery management plan for coastal migratory pelagic resources (CMP FMP). The SAFMC selected Preferred Alternative 2 to remove Atlantic cobia (only) from the CMP FMP, and allow the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) to manage Atlantic cobia in state and, in the absence of federal management, federal waters. The ASMFC has management authority under the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act. The reason for this proposed action is that Atlantic cobia saw early quota closures in 2016 and 2017. As the majority of Atlantic cobia are caught in state waters, the federal closure of Atlantic cobia harvest disproportionately affects the South Atlantic states which have not yet had an opportunity to fish for cobia by the time of the closure. Since this amendment is jointly managed by the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils, the two Councils must concur on a preferred alternative for CMP Amendment 31 to go forward.

Staff noted that at the recent Gulf and Atlantic cobia stock identification workshop it was determined that there was concurrence among spatial distribution, movement, and genetic data, which did not support moving the current stock boundary from the Florida/Georgia state line. The data did show a transition zone between (approximately) Savannah, Georgia and Cape Canaveral, Florida, in which Atlantic and Gulf cobia may interact; however, data in this region are sparse, and more research related to cobia movement in this region was recommended.

If the Councils remove Atlantic cobia from the CMP FMP, thereby determining that Atlantic cobia do not currently require federal management, then the management measures enacted in state waters by the ASMFC would be extended into federal waters. If the Councils determine at a future time that Atlantic cobia again require federal management, the Councils would then complete a plan amendment to add Atlantic cobia back into the CMP FMP and resume management of Atlantic cobia in federal waters at that time. Concurrently, if federal management is resumed by the Councils, management of Atlantic cobia by the ASMFC in federal waters would cease.

The Committee requested that staff develop language to be added to the document which would detail the following:

- The ASMFC has the authority to manage species in state waters only
- In the absence of federal management of a species, the states, or the ASMFC, can extend management into federal waters
- If the Councils determine at a later date that Atlantic cobia require federal management, then the two Councils would implement a plan amendment to reinsert Atlantic cobia into the CMP FMP and resume federal management
- If the Councils resume federal management of Atlantic cobia, management by the ASMFC in federal waters would end

Following discussion, the Committee made the following motion:

The Committee recommends, and I so move: **to make Alternative 2 the preferred alternative.**

Alternative 2: Remove the Atlantic migratory group of cobia from the Fishery Management Plan for Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources of the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Region.

Motion carried with no opposition.

Madam Chair, this concludes by report.