

Coastal Migratory Pelagics Advisory Panel

Meeting Summary

Tampa, FL

February 13, 2024

9:00 am – 4:00 pm

The meeting of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) Fishery Management Council's (Council) Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP) Advisory Panel (AP) was convened on February 13, 2024, at 9:00 am EST. Mr. Martin Fisher and Mr. Tom Marvel were elected as Chair and Vice Chair, respectively. The agenda and summary report from the December 1, 2022 meeting were approved as written.

Review of Coastal Migratory Pelagics Landings

Ms. Jennifer Lee (NMFS Southeast Regional Office [SERO]) walked through the Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit (ACL) Monitoring webpage to access preliminary CMP landings in relation to their respective ACLs. Dr. Mike Larkin (NMFS SERO) also presented an analysis on historical Gulf migratory group king mackerel (Gulf king mackerel) landings comparison by: sector, commercial zone, year and state, federal versus state waters, and monitoring units.

The AP was concerned about the decline in Gulf king mackerel landings and perceived stock condition. The AP was also concerned about the reliability and precision of recreational landings compared to the commercial sector. In addition, the AP noted that landing estimates in Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES) were almost 40% higher than the estimates from the current Coastal Household Telephone Survey (MRIP-CHTS). Landings in Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) units were also shown for comparison. An AP member suggested that the 2021 spike of recreational landings in federal waters could be due to effort displacement as a result of the nearshore red tide event in Florida.

Summary of MRIP-FES Pilot Study Results and SSC Discussion

Mr. John Foster (NOAA Office of Science and Technology [OST]) provided a presentation reviewing ongoing pilot study work of the FES portion of MRIP. The pilot study has focused on modifying the question order and questionnaire time period of the mail survey to assess effects on private recreational fishing effort estimates. A larger pilot study, underway for 2024, will include larger sample sizes and be conducted for an entire calendar year. The 2024 study results will be peer-reviewed in 2025.

The AP asked how OST generates its mailing list for the FES survey. Mr. Foster responded that they used both the address lists from the U.S. Postal Service and state fishing licensing programs. OST then compared the two mailing lists to create a matched and unmatched database, which can be used to inform where to send mailers. Several states allow exemptions for fishing

licensing (e.g., based on age, military service), so the unmatched list is used to quantify those who may be fishing but not identified by state private recreational data collection programs.

The AP asked about the survey response rate and what percentage of the total possible addresses are sent mailers. Mr. Foster replied that the response rate is approximately, 30 – 40% which he stated was above average relative to other national-scale surveys. He indicated that OST mails about 300,000 surveys per year and can get about 100,000 of those returned. Mr. Foster additionally stated that OST splits the sampling frame by coastal and non-coastal areas to achieve a certain level of precision in the estimates. The AP asked if there were any mechanisms in place to incentivize participation. Mr. Foster indicated that a monetary award of \$2 is included with the survey and continued that OST does not have the regulatory authority to relate MRIP participation with fishing license renewal.

The AP asked about the methods used to calibrate FES estimates back in time. Mr. Foster replied that the conversion of the historic time series was not simply applying a constant ratio back in time. Instead, a model-based approach which accounts for several time-dependent factors, such as prevalence of home phone landlines, is used to hindcast private recreational estimates. Mr. Foster completed his presentation and stated that MRIP represented a complimentary design (effort and catch) to generate estimates and this approach is used by other state fisheries agencies. He added that MRIP is a voluntary design due to regulatory limitation and is a cost-effective method for generating broad estimates.

The AP discussed its desire to improve private recreational data collection in the Gulf. An AP member argued that any method that helped focus sampling to individuals licensed to fish offshore and inquire more about their targeted effort would be worthwhile. A few AP members stated that several states have fishing licensing exemptions and identifying the universe of anglers may need to use another method. Council staff reported that the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission has presented to the Council some initial ideas for creating a federal offshore permit and that exploring novel approaches to managing the private recreational sectors is ongoing.

Motion: The CMP AP recommends that future FES studies include a separate sampling of saltwater license holders to be gathered monthly and identify within the sampling whether pelagic fishing or reef fish fishing has occurred.

Motion carried 9 – 3.

The AP noted that its discussions on recreational data collection were similar to those from the Reef Fish AP. The AP agreed with the Reef Fish AP's sentiment that other approaches for data collection are worth investigating and that MRIP-FES should not be used to inform sector allocation decisions at this time.

Motion: the CMP AP concurs with the Reef Fish AP's request that the Council encourage the Gulf states begin development of a uniform, standardized, mandatory reporting requirement for Gulf recreational anglers.

Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: the CMP AP requests that the Gulf Council delay any changes in allocation between the commercial and recreational sectors of any Gulf fishery resources that are subject to MRIP-FES until such time as the pilot study has been completed and deemed consistent with BSIA by the Gulf SSC, and the Council has empirical support for the actual level of recreational fishing effort in the Gulf.

Motion carried unanimously.

SEDAR 81: Gulf Migratory Group Spanish Mackerel

Council staff presented the findings of the SEDAR 81 Operational Assessment of Gulf of Mexico Migratory Group Spanish Mackerel (Gulf Spanish Mackerel). SEDAR 81 resolved several concerns from the previous model (SEDAR 28 2014), and incorporated updated recreational landings data calibrated to MRIP-FES data units. Converting from the historical MRIP-CHTS to FES did result in a marked increase in both estimated landings and discards from the recreational sector. Landings of Gulf Spanish mackerel have decreased in recent years; however, the stock remains healthy (i.e., not overfished and not experiencing overfishing). Recruitment has oscillated around the long-term mean, and most removals are by the recreational fleet. While it is an improvement on SEDAR 28, the SEDAR 81 modeling effort noted sensitivity to some key parameters, and gaps in length composition data. The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) ultimately accepted SEDAR 81 as the best scientific information available (BSIA) and recommended the Council adjust catch limits for Gulf Spanish Mackerel. The SSC recommended an overfishing limit (OFL) using a constant catch of 12.074 million pounds whole weight (mp ww) for 2025 – 2027, and an acceptable biological catch (ABC) using constant catch of 9.630 mp ww for 2025 – 2027.

AP members asked about the susceptibility of Gulf Spanish mackerel to water quality issues like the northern Gulf dead zone (hypoxic zone) and red tide. An AP member also asked whether the MRIP-FES landings data had to be used, or if some other alternative could be used instead. Council staff replied that the MRIP-FES data, in combination with LA Creel and the Texas recreational survey data, were the only data available for Gulf Spanish mackerel for this purpose.

Council staff presented a summary of the Council's Fishermen Feedback tool for Spanish mackerel, which collects fishermen sentiment about a species ahead of a stock assessment. A 117 responses were received, mostly from private recreational anglers and mostly from the eastern Gulf. Overall, anglers tended to have a negative to neutral view of the Gulf Spanish

mackerel stock, with over half of respondents saying they thought the stock was in trouble. Negative sentiment stretched from southwest Florida to eastern Louisiana, and shifted to more positive sentiment west of there. Shark depredation was commented on more frequently than any other negative sentiment about the Spanish mackerel stock.

Draft Framework Amendment 14: Modifications to Gulf Spanish Mackerel Catch Limits

Council staff presented a document that considers modifying the overfishing limit (OFL), acceptable biological catch (ABC), and stock ACL for Gulf Spanish mackerel. The action includes three alternatives: Alternative 1 is No Action and not consistent with the best scientific information available; Alternative 2 incorporates the SSC's recommendation for the OFL and ABC, and retains the definition of the ACL being equal to the ABC; and, Alternative 3 incorporates the SSC's recommendations for the OFL and ABC, and uses the Council's ACL/ACT control rule to determine the stock ACL. Alternatives 2 and 3 represent at least a 35% reduction from the current ACL. Staff also mentioned that an action to modify accountability measures (AM) is also being explored. Gulf Spanish mackerel has an in-season AM, in which if the stock ACL is reached or projected to be reached within a fishing year, the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register to close the fishery for the remainder of the fishing year.

The AP noted that similar to Gulf king mackerel, overall landings for Gulf Spanish mackerel have remained below the ACL and seem to be declining. Thus, some AP members had concerns about the health of the stock and debated whether an ACL of 9.36 million pounds whole weight would be a responsible measure. Council staff also noted that recent landings are close to the ACLs in Alternatives 2 and 3, and the Interdisciplinary Planning Team is exploring closure projections to be presented at the April 2024 Council meeting. There was a unified consensus that the Council should explore options to prevent closures to the fishery to prevent economic impacts.

The AP also discussed the potential causes for the decline in landings over time. An AP member commented that the stock was healthy, but that shark depredation is an issue. Another AP member also commented on reduced participation in the fishery unrelated to the condition of the stock. The AP also noted that recreational landings in MRIP-FES also seem high given their experience in the fishery, and that not many anglers seek to retain the 15-fish per person bag limit.

Motion: the CMP AP recommends that in Action 1 to make Alternative 2 the preferred.

Alternative 2: Modify the OFL, ABC, and stock ACL as recommended by the Council's SSC, for 2025/2026 – 2027/2028 and subsequent fishing years. Retain the stock ACL being set equal to the ABC.

Fishing Year	OFL	ABC	ACL
2025/2026 – 2027/2028 +	12.074	9.630	9.630

Catch limit values are in lbs lw. Note: OFL and ABC as recommended by the Gulf Council's SSC in lbs whole weight (ww). The recreational portion of the OFL, ABC, and ACL are based on MRIP-FES data.

Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: the CMP AP recommends that the Council explore options to reduce harvest in the Spanish mackerel fishery to prevent a fishery closure.

Motion carried 10 – 3.

Reiterating the concern for a potential closure of the fishery, the AP also discussed the option of exploring sector allocations. Mr. Dakus Geeslin (Council liaison) pointed out that the Council would consider this recommendation, but would not assure any action at this time. Council staff reminded the AP that at the October 2023 meeting, the Council passed a motion stating they would not pursue any sector allocations until the MRIP-FES pilot study was finalized. Although recognizing the uncertainties associated with MRIP-FES data, the AP still recommended initiating work on sector allocation.

Motion: to request the Council start work on a document that explores what sector allocations would look like for the Spanish mackerel fishery.

Motion carried 12 – 1.

Introduction to CMP Outreach Effort

Council staff presented the goals of an effort that would complement the South Atlantic Council's Mackerel Port meetings along the eastern seaboard. The goal of this effort is to capture angler's sentiment of the status of the mackerel fishery and perceptions of what may be causing issues. Due to historically low participation at in-person meetings, the Gulf Council will focus on engaging with its APs, and the use of online tools. The CMP AP was asked a series of questions and the outcomes will be summarized in a separate report.

A common theme of increased shark depredation was raised throughout the meeting. Mr. Geeslin also mentioned that the U.S. House of Representatives passed on February 8, 2024, the Supporting the Health of Aquatic Systems through Research, Knowledge, and Enhanced Dialogue (SHARKED) Act ([H.R. 4051](#)). The SHARKED Act directs NOAA to create a task force to study shark depredation. The AP was encouraged by the Congress' effort and thought the Council should engage in the conversation.

Motion: The CMP AP strongly recommends that the Gulf Council write a letter compelling NMFS to conduct research regarding shark depredation in the harvest and regulatory discards of the Gulf reef and coastal migratory pelagic fisheries.

Motion carried 12-1.

Public Comment: There was an opportunity for in-person a virtual public comment at the end of the agenda, but none was provided.

Meeting adjourned at 3:41 pm.

Participants List:

CMP AP

Martin Fisher, *Chair*
Tom Marvel, *Vice-Chair*
Steven Asher
William Campbell
Justin Fadalla
Benjamin Knight
David Krebs
Christopher Mallory

Alex Murry
Lance Robinson
William Stein
Ed Swindell
Robert Woithe

Council Representative

Dakus Geeslin
Ed Walker

Council Staff

Natasha Méndez-Ferrer
Emily Muehlstein
Ryan Rindone
John Froeschke
Carrie Simmons
Camilla Shireman
Bernadine Roy