

**Summary Report of
Coastal Migratory Pelagics Advisory Panel
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
Webinar Meeting**

**Thursday, July 22, 2021
1:00 pm EDT – 4:00 pm EDT**

The Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) Fishery Management Council's (Council) Coastal Migratory Pelagics Advisory Panel (CMP AP) was convened at 1:00 PM EDT on July 22, 2021. The agenda and minutes of the March 24, 2021 meeting were approved as written.

SEDAR 38 Update: Gulf of Mexico King Mackerel

Stock Assessment

Mr. Ryan Rindone (Council Staff) summarized the results from the SEDAR 38 Update (SEDAR 38U, 2020) stock assessment for the Gulf migratory group king mackerel (Gulf king mackerel), with the 2017/2018 fishing year being the terminal year of data used. This assessment builds on SEDAR 38 (2014), and changes include the incorporation of Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES) and a revised median estimate of shrimp bycatch. Updating the recreational catch and effort data using MRIP-FES increased those estimates for the recreational fleet across the time series. Shrimp bycatch was fixed at a median level for 1975 – 2017, and using an updated methodology, was estimated to be three times higher than in SEDAR 38. The stock is determined to be healthy, is not overfished or undergoing overfishing. However, the spawning stock biomass (SSB) is below the SSB at maximum sustainable yield (MSY). Projections included in SEDAR 38U suggest that at the current level of landings, there is a low probability of overfishing occurring in the short-term.

Something's Fishy

Ms. Carly Somerset (Council Staff) presented the results from the Council's Something's Fishy tool for Gulf king mackerel. A total of 47 responses were recorded from September 6 to October 6, 2019, with a majority of respondents identifying as private anglers. Manual classification of the responses indicated a negative trend in stock health or abundance, while the automated analysis showed a minor trend towards a positive perception. When evaluating the response sentiment by location, negative responses seemed to be higher in the northern Gulf states compared to Texas and central and south Florida. AP members asked if any of the responses from the northern Gulf were in relation to hypoxia issues, and wondered if there might be any correlation between fewer Gulf king mackerel there and the Mississippi plume. Council staff investigated further into the responses but did not find direct mention of hypoxia, the Dead Zone, or nutrient influx from freshwater sources. Instead, staff noted some of the negative responses were associated with a mention of "lack of bait"

Draft Amendment 33: Modifications to the Gulf of Mexico Migratory Group King Mackerel Catch

Mr. Rindone presented draft options to be considered in CMP Amendment 33. This amendment examines modifications of Gulf king mackerel catch limits and sector allocations. Gulf king mackerel is managed jointly between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils; thus, both Councils

need to agree on the preferred alternatives before final action. Council staff reminded the AP that this document is currently in its early stages, and includes an unresolved issue with historical commercial landings data discrepancies, and that communication with the Southeast Fishery Science Center is ongoing.

Action 1

Action 1 would modify the overfishing limit (OFL), acceptable biological catch (ABC), and annual catch limit (ACL) for the Gulf king mackerel stock. Alternative 2 would modify catch limits based on recommendations to the Council's SSC, based on the results of the SEDAR 38 Update. An AP member asked if selecting the increase in the total ACL included in Alternative 2 would translate to an increase in the ACL for both sectors. Council staff indicated that proposed catch limits incorporate MRIP-FES data, and that without a modification to the current allocation (68% recreational and 32% commercial), the total ACL poundage would increase for both sectors. Council staff also noted that under these conditions and current management measures, the recreational sector is expected to remain below its ACL, as it has for the last 20 years. The commercial sector consistently meets or exceeds its ACL. Council staff summarized what the catch limits would have been had SEDAR 38 (2014) used MRIP-FES adjusted recreational catch and effort data. Recruitment has been lower in the past 10 years when compared to the long-term average since the early 1980s; this recent trend in recruitment may be exacerbating the recent increasing trend in fishing mortality, since fewer individuals are being created to offset removals.

Under the current level of fishing effort and the current sector allocation, it is not estimated that the proposed ACLs in Alternative 2 will be reached, based on historical harvest levels by the recreational sector. An AP member asked if there is a way to include an alternative in which the increase in the ACL would go directly to the commercial sector, which is the sector that consistently lands its ACL. Council staff responded that an alternative like that could be explored with sector allocations (i.e., Action 2).

Motion: To recommend that the Council adopt Alternative 2 in Action 1 as the preferred alternative.

Motion carried without opposition.

Action 2

Action 2 would modify the sector allocation and commercial zone quotas for Gulf king mackerel. Because sector allocation does not affect the annual yield projections, Alternative 1 is a viable alternative (68% recreational, 32% commercial). The sector allocation described in Alternative 1 dates back to Amendment 1 to the CMP FMP, and was based on the available landings for 1975 – 1979, and includes a 2% shift in allocation to the commercial sector to account for for-hire sales of king mackerel. Under Alternative 1 (no action), the commercial sector could see an increase in its ACL under the Alternative 2 of Action 1. Alternative 2 would modify the sector allocation by reallocating to the commercial sector a percentage of the average difference between the total landings from the 2016/2017 through 2019/2020 fishing years using MRIP-FES data and the total projected ACL for 2023/2024 from Action 1. Alternative 3 would modify the sector allocation of the stock ACL by reallocating to the commercial sector a

percentage of the average difference between the total landings from the 2010/2011 through 2019/2020 fishing years using MRIP-FES data and the total projected ACL for 2023/2024 from Action 1. Alternatives 2 and 3 both use the total projected ACL for 2023/2024 from Action 1 because this catch limit is most likely to be in place when CMP Amendment 33 could reasonably go into effect.

Council staff reviewed that the preference of both the Council and CMP AP is for the recreational fishery to remain open year-round. A reduction in the recreational sector's ACL that approaches the recent average of landings in MRIP-FES (which estimates greater harvest and effort than previous data currencies) could increase the possibility of a quota closure for that sector. Given the trends in recreational landings in the past four fishing years, Option 2b of Alternative 2 represents the most that could be reallocated to the commercial sector without immediately risking a recreational quota closure.

AP members debated sector reallocation, given that the recreational sector is consistently under its ACL, therefore leaving fish in the water. The AP also mentioned that transitioning those uncaught fish to the commercial sector would be an avenue to increase revenue. Previous discussions with the Council and CMP AP also mentioned that there is social and economic value to the recreational sector in leaving those fish unharvested, as fishing trips are being booked for the experience of catching king mackerel, even though some anglers end up releasing the fish instead of harvesting them.

An AP member asked about the possibility to divide the recreational sector by zones, similar to the management of the commercial sector. Concerns were raised about the manner in which the data are collected and reported, about the migratory nature of the stock, and about how fishing effort is not equally distributed throughout the Gulf.

An AP member also asked why the stock biomass is not increasing, even though harvest has remained below the total ACL. Council staff responded that recruitment has been highly cyclical, with the last 10 years of recruitment being lower than the long-term average. Some AP members expressed concern regarding an insufficient understanding of the stock recruitment relationship and recommending any increases to the stock ACL. Similarly, an AP member opposed increasing removals by way of increasing the ACL for the commercial sector given the effects of climate change, especially in relation to increased sea surface temperature and nutrient runoff. The AP member suggested that leaving a buffer of unharvested fish in the recreational sector's ACL was beneficial to the resiliency of the stock.

The AP also discussed conditional quota transfers, as previously considered in CMP Amendment 29, which would have established allocation sharing between the sectors. Under this system, a portion of the total ACL would be conditionally transferred to the commercial sector, and added to the commercial sector ACL. The recreational sector would remain open and, if recreational landings reach a certain proportion of the recreational ACL, the portion of the total ACL that had been added to the commercial ACL would be transferred back to the recreational sector in the following year. It was restated that, based on input from previous CMP AP and Council meetings, there is interest from the recreational sector in leaving those uncaught king mackerel in the water, as doing so increases the probability of catching the fish for recreational purposes. An

AP member proposed only revisiting the shift in allocation based on three-year averages, thereby providing some stability in the ACLs year-over-year.

Motion: To create a new Alternative 4 under Action 2 to explore an allocation sharing alternative, similar to that in CMP 29, except to recalibrate it every 3 years.

Motion carried six to four with one absent and one abstention.

Other Business

An AP member discussed the concept of removing the minimum size limit to reduce dead discards, as by the time the undersized fish make it to the boat, they may already be dead.

Motion: To eliminate the minimum size limit for commercial Gulf king mackerel.

Motion carried nine to one, with one absent.

The AP also raised issues with fish identification of smaller king mackerel, especially when being compared to Spanish mackerel, and suggested setting similar size limits to that of Spanish mackerel (i.e., 12 inches fork length).

Motion: To recommend the Council set the recreational size limit for king mackerel equal to Spanish mackerel.

Motion carried without opposition.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 pm.

List of Participants- In Progress

CMP AP

Martin Fisher, Chair
Kesley Banks
Charles Bergman
Joshua Ellender
Chris Jenkins
Chris Mallory
Jeffrey Mathews
George Niles

Kelty Readenour
William Stein
Ed Walker
Robert Woithe

Council Liaison

Robin Riechers

Council Staff

Natasha Méndez-Ferrer
Ryan Rindone
Carrie Simmons
John Froeschke
Jessica Matos
Camilla Shireman
Carly Somerset