

**Mackerel Committee Report
April 12, 2021
Mr. Robin Riechers – Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab C, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab C, No. 2**) of the January 2021 meeting as written.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP) Landings Update (Tab C, No. 4)

Mr. Peter Hood (NMFS Southeast Regional Office) reviewed the recent landings for the Gulf migratory groups of cobia, king mackerel, and Spanish mackerel. Recreational landings for 2020 are still incomplete as a result of the sampling limitations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Hood highlighted a potential discrepancy in the commercial data for Gulf king mackerel in 2021. The data will be reevaluated and corrected if they are determined to be erroneous. Ms. Bosarge mentioned that the higher landings in 2021 could be a reflection of reopening markets from the initial COVID-related closures. The commercial Southern Zone hook and line king mackerel season was closed on February 22, 2021, as it was projected to meet the annual catch limit (ACL). However, landings stabilized and the Zone was reopened for five consecutive fishing days (April 4 – 8), and closed on April 9, 2021.

Amendment 32: Modifications to the Gulf of Mexico Migratory Group Cobia Catch Limits, Possession Limits, Size Limits, and Framework Procedure (Tab C, No. 5)

Council staff presented a revised version of Chapters 1 and 2 of Coastal Migratory Pelagic (CMP) Amendment 32. The revised document includes a new action (now Action 3) to modify sector allocations in the Florida East Coast (FLEC) Zone, along with preferred alternatives from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) and recommendations from the CMP Advisory Panel (CMP AP).

Action 1 would modify the Gulf migratory group cobia (Gulf Group Cobia) catch limits. Both Council and the CMP AP currently recommend Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative, and no additional changes were made.

Action 2 would modify the apportionment between the Gulf and FLEC Zones, and update each Zone's ACL based on the Gulf Group Cobia ACL from Action 1. Preferred Alternative 3 would modify the Zone apportionment to 63% for the Gulf Zone and 37% for the FLEC Zone, and incorporate the transition to the Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES) data currency. Council staff and the Committee discussed the large number of combinations in the management actions included in this document, and how this could complicate future analyses related to combined and cumulative effects. The Committee considered removing Alternative 4 from Action 2, since the difference in Zone apportionments between Alternatives 3 and 4 is only 1%. Retaining Alternative 5 in the document still allows for considerations of using a more recent time series for calculating the apportionment.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in **Action 2, to remove Alternative 4 to considered but rejected.**

Alternative 4: Modify the Gulf Group Cobia stock ACL apportionment at 62% to the Gulf Zone and 38% to the FLEC Zone, based on the MRIP-FES average landings for Gulf Group Cobia for the years 2001 – 2015, and use this apportionment to update the Zone ACLs based on the Gulf Group Cobia ACL(s) in Action 1.

Motion carried with no opposition.

Action 3 proposes to modify the allocation between the recreational and commercial sectors in the FLEC Zone. The Gulf Zone manages its cobia as a single stock; thus, it is not included in this action. The Committee deferred selecting alternatives until the SAFMC provides input on this action, as it falls within their jurisdiction.

Action 4 proposes to update the established annual catch targets (ACT) for the Gulf and FLEC Zones. In the FLEC Zone, only the recreational sector has an ACT. This action also provides the opportunity to establish an ACT for the FLEC Zone commercial sector. The Committee discussed the implications of using the GMFMC ACL/ACT Control Rule to calculate the FLEC Zone recreational ACT, instead of proportional standard error (PSE), as the error increased with the transition to MRIP-FES. The Committee also discussed the implications of this action and how it relates to season closures in each Zone. In the Gulf Zone, the fishing season is closed once the Zone's ACT is met or projected to be met. Preliminary closure analyses suggest that with no additional management changes, the Gulf Zone ACT is expected to be met in August or September of 2021 under all ACL and ACT alternatives being considered. The FLEC Zone has a post-season accountability measure that applies to the recreational sector such that if the combined ACL (i.e., recreational and commercial) is exceeded, the length of the following fishing season is reduced by the amount necessary to achieve the recreational ACT, but not exceed the recreational ACL. Staff will continue working on the discussion section in this action to update and refine the closure analyses.

Action 5 has been split into sub-actions to address changes to possession, vessel, and trip limits by Zone. For Action 5.1 (Gulf Zone), the Committee discussed removing the commercial sector from having a reduction in the per person daily possession limit, as this action is not expected to result in a significant reduction in fishing mortality. Members of the Committee also commented about enforcing similar regulations as those in Florida state waters (i.e., one per person or two per vessel per day, whichever is less, for both sectors). Ms. Guyas also mentioned that given the status of the stock, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission may not consider making their regulations less stringent.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in **Action 5.1, to remove "Preferred" from Option 2b in Alternative 2.**

Preferred Alternative 2: Reduce the daily possession limit to 1 fish per person, regardless of the number or duration of trips.

Preferred Option 2a: for the recreational sector

Preferred Option 2b: for the commercial sector

Motion carried with one opposition.

In Action 5.2 (FLEC Zone), the Committee also approved the SAFMC's preferred alternatives associated to modifications in their jurisdiction.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, **in Action 5.2, to select all the South Atlantic Preferred Alternative and Options.**

South Atlantic Preferred Alternative 2: Reduce the daily possession limit to 1 fish per person, regardless of the number or duration of trips.

South Atlantic Preferred Option 2a: for the recreational sector

South Atlantic Preferred Option 2b: for the commercial sector

South Atlantic Preferred Alternative 3: Create a recreational vessel limit. Fishermen may not exceed the per person daily possession limit.

South Atlantic Preferred Option 3a: The vessel limit is two fish per trip

Option 3b: The vessel limit is four fish per trip

Option 3c: The vessel limit is six fish per trip.

South Atlantic Preferred Alternative 4: Create a commercial vessel trip limit. Fishermen may not exceed the per person daily possession limit.

South Atlantic Preferred Option 4a: The vessel trip limit is two fish.

Option 4b: The vessel trip limit is four fish.

Option 4c: The vessel trip limit is six fish.

Motion carried with no opposition.

Action 6 proposed an increase to the minimum size limit. The Committee agreed preferred Alternative 2 would increase the size limit in the FLEC Zone from 33 inches to 36 inches fork length, or the same as in the Gulf Zone. The increase of the minimum size limit in the Gulf Zone was implemented in March 2020, and the effects have not been captured by recent landings data.

Action 7 proposes modifications to language in the CMP Framework Procedure to allow the SAFMC to independently approve management measures that affect fishing within their jurisdiction. This language only applies to actions that can be addressed through a Framework Amendment. Changes that would affect the entire stock, such as catch limits, allocations, zone apportionment, and the inclusion/exclusion of species in the CMP fishery management plan still require the approval of both Councils.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, **in Action 7, to make Alternative 2 the preferred.**

Motion carried with two in opposition.

The Committee discussed the implications of the proposed catch limits and the potential for in-season closures. Ms. Guyas asked about how these potential in-season closures might affect different Gulf regions. Council staff is continuing to work on updating the analyses, including the development of a decision support tool.

Remaining Coastal Migratory Pelagics AP Recommendations (Tab C, No. 6)

Council staff went over the remaining items that were discussed during the CMP AP meeting on March 24, 2021. Mr. Martin Fisher, Chair of the CMP AP, commented that the AP is not against commercial electronic logbooks, but that the current proposal could be simplified and improved. This discussion was continued during the Data Collection Committee.

Discussion of Individual Fishing Quota for Gulf King Mackerel for the Gulf Southern Zone-Gillnet (Tab C, No. 7)

Mr. Sanchez spoke on behalf of the Gulf king mackerel gillnet fishery in the Southern Zone. A letter from the Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association was distributed to the Committee. The discussion focused on a request to increase the quota in this zone, as current fishing regulations result in a short fishing season (i.e., starts third Monday of January each year) compared to other commercial king mackerel zones in the Gulf. The initial proposal considered the implementation of a catch-share type program (i.e., individual transferable quota or individual fishing quota), but the majority of gillnet permit holders have not agreed to this change. Mr. Sanchez also proposed an exempted fishing permit (EFP) as an approach to experiment with more efficient ways to prosecute the Gulf king mackerel gillnet fishery. This fishery currently has payback provisions on overages as a post-season AM, is mostly self-regulated, and landings are reported daily to SERO. Mr. Strelcheck (SERO) commented that EFPs are intended for limited duration and as a tool to learn new ways that can improve management, not necessarily as a tool to increase industry buy-in.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.