

**Mackerel Committee Report
September 28, 2020
Mr. Robin Riechers– Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab C, No. 1**) as modified to include a discussion on a data request for king mackerel landings, and approved the minutes (**Tab C, No. 2**) of the October 2018 meeting as written.

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

Mr. Peter Hood (NMFS) reviewed the recent commercial and recreational king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia landings and noted that recreational landings for 2020 are delayed due to sampling issues in waves 2 and 3.

Review of SEDAR 28 Update: Gulf of Mexico Migratory Group Cobia Stock Assessment (Tab C, No. 5)

Dr. Joe Powers reviewed the results from the SEDAR 28 Update assessment (SEDAR 28U) for Gulf cobia with 2018 as the terminal year of data. Based on SEDAR 28U, the SSC determined that Gulf cobia is not overfished but is experiencing overfishing. SEDAR 28U included recreational catch and effort data adjusted for MRIP-FES. Gulf cobia landings come predominantly from federal waters and attributed to the recreational sector. The results from SEDAR 28U indicate the fishing mortality rate is higher than the fishing mortality rate at maximum sustainable yield (F_{MSY}). The SSC decided to use the projections at 75% of F_{MSY} , with MSY defined using a proxy of 30% of the spawning potential ratio ($F_{SPR30\%}$). The SSC recommends the following overfishing limit (OFL) and allowable biological catch (ABC) that are in fishing effort survey (FES) units in millions of pounds whole weight for the years 2021 to 2023:

| Year | OFL | ABC |
|------|------|------|
| 2021 | 3.03 | 2.34 |
| 2022 | 3.21 | 2.60 |
| 2023 | 3.31 | 2.76 |

The Committee questioned how is it possible that Gulf cobia had undergone overfishing every year from 1975 through 2018, with the exception of 1993 and 2009, yet the stock is not overfished. Dr. Powers indicated that this is not a unique condition. It is possible for a stock to experience high fishing mortality rates while remaining in an overall stable, but below biomass at MSY, condition. Dr. Porch (SEFSC) also mentioned that a stock is not deemed overfished until the stock is below the minimum stock size threshold (MSST) that is well below the spawning stock biomass (SSB) at MSY (in this case, $SSB_{SPR30\%}$).

The Committee asked what percent reduction from the current catch limits is currently being recommended. Council staff explained that although the proposed catch limits seem to have increased relative to status quo, the proposed catch limits are in MRIP-FES currency whereas the

current catch levels are based on SEDAR 28 in MRIP-CHTS (units that are lower than MRIP-FES). If SEDAR 28 had included catch recommendations in MRIP-FES, the current recommendations would result in an approximately 30% reduction in allowable harvest.

Council staff reviewed the results from its Something's Fishy tool, where the majority of respondents identified with the private recreational sector. Analyses point towards respondents reporting smaller and fewer fish than have been observed historically.

The Committee recommends, and I so move: **to direct staff to start a plan amendment to reduce the fishing mortality in the commercial and recreational cobia fishery in the Gulf of Mexico, which will include bag limits, vessel limits, size limits, seasons and catch limit options.**

Motion carried with no opposition.

Ms. Guyas noted that Florida has a one fish per person bag limit for the commercial and recreational sectors, and a vessel limit of 2 fish, whichever is less, for both sectors. The Committee also highlighted the importance of encouraging fishermen to use nets instead of gaffs when landing cobia to reduce fishing mortality. The Committee asked about the level of involvement by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) required for this document. Council staff indicated that Gulf cobia is jointly managed in the CMP Fishery Management Plan with the South Atlantic Council, and that a portion of the Gulf cobia stock is apportioned for management by the South Atlantic Council in the Florida East Coast Zone. Therefore, both the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils will be involved in the development of this document.

Other Business: Data Request – King Mackerel (Tab C, No. 6)

As the Committee is scheduled to review the SEDAR 38 update stock assessment for Gulf king mackerel during the October 2020 Council meeting, Mr. Sanchez requested to see an analysis of king mackerel sector landings and catch limits in MRIP-FES data currency.

The Committee recommends, and I so move: **to request an analysis of king mackerel sector landings and quotas for the past 5-10 years with recreational landings and quotas in FES currency.**

Motion carried with no opposition.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.