

**Mackerel Committee Report
October 27, 2020
Mr. Riechers – Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab C, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab C, No. 2**) of the September 2020 meeting as written.

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

Mr. Peter Hood (NMFS) reviewed the recent commercial and recreational king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia landings. The Committee requested king mackerel recreational quota in Marine Recreational Information Program's (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES) currency. This comparison was requested during the September 2020 Council meeting. Council staff provided tables comparing recreational landings between MRIP-Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) and MRIP-FES, as well as in relation to the recreational annual catch limit (ACL) and stock ACL (**Tab C, No. 5f**). Committee members discussed that the request could not be achieved by a simple conversion from MRIP-CHTS to MRIP-FES, as it would involve more steps to account for the calculations used to determine sector allocations. Council staff will coordinate with Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) staff to address this data request and present at a future meeting.

Review of SEDAR 38 Update: Gulf of Mexico Migratory King Mackerel Stock Assessment (Tab C, No. 5)

Dr. Joe Powers of the Council's Scientific and statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the SEDAR 38 Update stock assessment on the Gulf migratory group of king mackerel (Gulf king mackerel), which was updated with data through the 2017 fishing year. Key changes from SEDAR 38 (2014) include the incorporation of recreational catch and effort data from the MRIP-FES and in the methods for estimating shrimp bycatch. Overall, the SEDAR 38 Update assessment found Gulf king mackerel to be not overfished (spawning stock biomass [SSB] was 112% of the minimum stock size threshold [MSST]) and not experiencing overfishing (the fishing mortality from the previous three fishing years was 84% of the maximum fishing mortality threshold [MFMT]). The SSB is, however, slightly below the SSB at maximum sustainable yield (MSY).

Upon reviewing the SEDAR 38 Update assessment, the SSC found the assessment to be the best scientific information available and to be suitable for providing management advice. Projections for Gulf king mackerel considered several scenarios, including the fishing mortality rate at MFMT, and the fishing mortality rate at optimum yield (F_{OY} ; 85% of F_{MSY} [$F_{30\%SPR}$]). The SSC then recommended overfishing limit (OFL) values of 10.89 million pounds (mp) whole weight (ww), 11.05 mp ww, and 11.18 mp ww for the years 2021, 2022, and 2023, respectively. The SSC decided to forego the use of the Council's Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rule in determining the ABC for Gulf king mackerel, as the projections did not appear to adequately capture the uncertainty inherent in the projections. Instead, the SSC made ABC

recommendations using Foy, resulting in ABCs of 9.37 mp ww, 9.72 mp ww, and 9.99 mp ww for the fishing years 2021, 2022, and 2023, respectively.

The Committee asked why the OFL and corresponding ABC projections are increasing in the short-term. Dr. Powers noted that the stock is above the MSST, but below SSB_{MSY} . The catch recommendations are designed to increase the SSB to SSB_{MSY} ; therefore, the catch recommendations increase as the stock builds towards SSB_{MSY} .

Historically, the recreational sector has left a portion of their king mackerel ACL uncaught. The Committee asked whether it was likely that the recreational sector could be landing a much larger portion of its ACL under MRIP-FES. Dr. Powers added that it was likely that recreational landings should increase relative to the new ACL under FES; however, the degree to which they may increase is uncertain.

Council staff reviewed the results of the use of the Council's Something's Fishy tool for Gulf king mackerel, which collected data on the stock in the fall of 2019. In this iteration, Something's Fishy collected responses from 47 fishermen, most of whom were private anglers indicating a negative trend in stock abundance, especially in the northern Gulf. The Committee provided feedback on the tool for increasing its utility in the future.

The Committee asked about timing for recommending management changes, given the nature of the fishing years for Gulf king mackerel. While some Committee members discussed reallocating between the fishing sectors, others expressed opposition, given that the recreational sector has not been catching its ACL. Committee members advocating for reallocation wished for consideration of more of the stock ACL being allocated to the commercial sector, which has routinely landed or marginally exceeded its ACL in the past. Changing the allocations would ultimately result in adjustments to the projections, and to the recommended catch limits already reviewed. In addition, SERO staff noted that since the data used for the current sector allocation is an older time series, there is opportunity to explore modifications.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, **to direct staff to start a plan amendment to look at sector allocations as well as adjust catch limits for Gulf king mackerel.**

Motion carried 8 to 2, with 1 abstention.

Gulf of Mexico Migratory Group Cobia (Gulf Cobia) Draft Options Presentation (Tab C, No. 6)

Council staff reviewed recent management actions and stock assessment history for the Gulf migratory group of cobia (Gulf cobia) and the draft actions to be considered in CMP Amendment 32. The stock is undergoing overfishing as of 2018, per the 2020 SEDAR 28 Update stock assessment. The stock is not overfished, but the SSB is below SSB_{MSY} . The stock is jointly managed between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, with Gulf cobia occurring from Texas east and north to the Florida-Georgia state line. Action 1 would modify the Gulf cobia catch limits; Action 2 would modify the apportionment between the Gulf Zone and the Florida East

Coast Zone (FLEC); Action 3 would modify the daily possession limit; Action 4 would modify the minimum size limit; and, Action 5 would modify the framework procedures for the CMP fishery management plan (FMP).

Alternative 2 of Action 1 would modify these catch limits based on the projections from the assessment, and would update the catch limits based on catch and effort data from the MRIP-FES, which has resulted in an increase in the catch limits irrespective of the change in SSB between the last two assessments. The other alternatives presented in Action 2 explore different ways for reconsidering the apportionment in Alternative 1, accounting for the inclusion of MRIP-FES data in the most recent stock assessment. The current apportionment was established in CMP Amendment 20B. Reducing the per-person daily possession limit in Action 3 results in limited benefits with respect to reductions in harvest, as does a vessel limit, largely because most anglers targeting cobia only intermittently interact with the species. Some Committee members expressed support for exploring this action further, perhaps with consideration of having separate vessel limits for different vessel types (private vessels versus federal for-hire vessels). Other alternatives in Action 4 explore increasing the minimum size limit to 36 inches FL in the FLEC, and also increasing it to 39 inches or 42 inches in either zone. Increasing the minimum size limit achieves a higher percent reduction than changes to the possession limits. It is important to note that the Committee chose to increase the minimum size limit to 36 inches FL, and not higher, because larger individuals tend to be more likely to be female. Thus, increasing the minimum size limit higher than 36 inches FL may disproportionately target the female portion of the SSB. Ms. Guyas noted that as the amendment develops, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission may reevaluate its regulations for state waters on both coasts. Lastly, under Action 5, the South Atlantic Council is presently permitted to make changes to vessel limits, closed areas, and gear restrictions. Alternative 2 would afford more autonomy to the South Atlantic Council for the management of its apportionment of Gulf cobia in the FLEC. Committee members expressed some reservation about the allowance of the South Atlantic Council to manage more autonomously, given the depressed condition of the stock and the need to end overfishing.

This document will undergo continued development, and will be brought back before the Committee at the Council's January 2021 meeting.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.