

**Mackerel Committee Report
October 25, 2023
Mr. Dakus Geeslin – Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab C, No. 1**) as written, and approved the minutes of the August 2023 (**Tab C, No. 2**) as modified.

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

Mr. Peter Hood (NMFS Southeast Regional Office) reviewed the recent coastal migratory pelagic (CMP) landings for the Gulf migratory groups of cobia, king mackerel, and Spanish mackerel. A Committee member asked the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) if it would be possible to monitor Gulf Spanish mackerel catch limits in pounds whole weight (ww), instead of landed weight (combined whole and gutted weight) given the conversion factor being almost a 1:1. This would maintain consistency with the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) recommendations. Another Committee member noted that commercial Spanish mackerel are sold as whole fish and not gutted. The SEFSC agreed that it makes sense to maintain consistency.

Draft Framework Amendment 14: Modifications to Gulf Spanish Mackerel Catch Limits, Tab C, No. 5)

Council staff reviewed the document that considers modifying the catch limits for the Gulf migratory group of Spanish mackerel (Gulf Spanish mackerel) based on the recent SEDAR 81 stock assessment and the Council’s SSC revised catch limit recommendations. SEDAR 81 transitioned the recreational catch and effort data to the Marine Recreational Information Program’s Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES), and determined the stock was healthy as of 2021. The SSC’s catch limits constitute a reduction of approximately 35% compared to the current catch limits. The SSC recommended an overfishing limit (OFL) of 12.074 million pounds whole weight (mp ww) and an acceptable biological catch (ABC) of 9.63 mp ww. An alternative using the Council’s Annual Catch Limit (ACL)/Annual Catch Target (ACT) Control Rule would result in an ACL of 8.667 mp ww, reduced from the ABC by 10% based on historical landings. Though the recent landings have not exceeded the proposed catch limits, it is not out of the question for an overage of the ACL in the future.

A Committee member thought the variability in the landings might necessitate a larger buffer between the ACL and ABC, perhaps 20%. Other Committee members were less concerned about an overage, noting that there is a considerable buffer between the OFL and ABC (approximately 20%, or 2.444 mp ww). Council staff reviewed their exposure analysis (See Tab F: Data Committee Summary), which classifies Gulf Spanish mackerel as a Tier 3 stock with medium exposure. The stock requires MRIP-FES data for private vessels and the shore mode, but does not have sector or jurisdictional allocations to adjust. SERO clarified that if the ACL reaches or is projected to be reached in a fishing year, then the fishing season for both sectors is closed for the remainder of that fishing year. A Committee member noted that lowering the ACL increases the probability of exceeding it, and if lowering the ACL was the goal, the Council should also consider other measures to reduce catch per unit effort and retention. A Committee member expressed concern about using MRIP-FES data for management with Gulf Spanish

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mackerel, considering the stated survey bias from the 2023 MRIP-FES pilot study. NOAA General Counsel replied that the stock assessment from which the catch advice was derived, which used MRIP-FES, was determined to be consistent with the best scientific information available, and suitable for use in management. The SEFSC added that the stock status did not change under the sensitivity run in which the landings for Gulf Spanish mackerel were reduced commensurate with the overestimation detailed in the 2023 MRIP-FES pilot study. The SEFSC added that management benchmarks under the sensitivity run (see Tab B, No. 4a) varied only by a few percentage points from the original SEDAR 81 model run. A Committee member thought the earliest fishing season that would be affected by any management action here would be the 2024/2025 fishing season. Council staff clarified that the Committee should not expect an interim analysis to be possible for Gulf Spanish mackerel due to the lack of a robust fishery-independent index of abundance. The Committee ultimately proposed no changes to the purpose and need or alternatives presented.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.