

Mackerel Committee Report June 21, 2022 Mr. Robin Riechers – Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab C, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab C, No. 2**) of the April 2022 meeting as written.

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

Ms. Kelli O'Donnell (NMFS Southeast Regional Office [SERO]) reviewed the recent landings for the Gulf migratory groups of cobia, king mackerel, and Spanish mackerel.

A Committee member asked about the low cobia landings and if this was due to no intercepts or a reflection of the condition of the stock. At the time, Ms. O'Donnell could not answer the question since it would require revisiting the original dataset. A Committee member commented that anglers in Alabama have also reported very low numbers of cobia, and king and Spanish mackerel.

Final Action: Framework Amendment 11: Modifications to the Gulf of Mexico Migratory Group King Mackerel Catch Limits (Tab C, No. 5)

Staff reviewed Framework Amendment 11, which considers modifying the catch levels for Gulf migratory group king mackerel (Gulf king mackerel). Recommendations follow the results from the SEDAR 38 update assessment which determined Gulf king mackerel to not be overfished or undergoing overfishing.

A Committee member noted that just by virtue of adopting new catch limits without addressing allocation, Alternative 2 would result in a reallocation to the commercial sector. Council staff concurred, noting that the transition from Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Coastal Household Telephone System to Fishing Effort Survey (FES) recognizes increased historical private recreational catch and effort. Not reallocating to the recreational sector does result in an increase in the catch limits for the commercial sector. A Committee member noted that had MRIP-FES been used when the original catch limits were put into effect, it is estimated from the analysis conducted by the SEFSC, the commercial sector would have been allowed to catch over a million pounds more than they were allowed based on the results of the original SEDAR 38 stock assessment.

A Committee member expressed concern about the comments from the fleets about not seeing king mackerel this year like in previous years, and asked about the composition of the fish being captured by the Southern Zone Gillnet fleet. Council staff noted that given the 4.75-inch mesh size of the run-around gillnets used by that fleet and their portion of the commercial annual catch limit, the younger/smaller king mackerel were likely to get through that net. Another Committee member mentioned the possibility of a change in the migratory patterns for the species, as some fishermen are still able to find Gulf king mackerel. Council staff described the current landings by commercial zone, which are below the typical landings observed in this fishery. The Committee member noted that other factors, like elevated fuel prices, may be affecting commercial landings for the 2021/2022 fishing year.

Council staff reviewed the public comments received for Framework Amendment 11, which noted that Gulf king mackerel landings were down for the last few fishing years, and may be attributable to red tide or changes in migratory patterns.

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

Alternative 2: Revise the OFL and ABC for Gulf king mackerel as recommended by the Gulf SSC for 2021/2022 – 2023/2024 and subsequent fishing years. Retain the total ACL being set equal to the ABC; an annual catch target (ACT) is not used.

Fishing Year	OFL	ABC	Total ACL	Rec ACL	Comm ACL
2021/2022	10,890,000	9,370,000	9,370,000	6,371,600	2,998,400
2022/2023	11,050,000	9,720,000	9,720,000	6,609,600	3,110,400
2023/2024+	11,180,000	9,990,000	9,990,000	6,793,200	3,196,800

Catch limit values are in lbs lw. Note: OFL and ABC as recommended by the Gulf SSC in lbs ww. The recreational portion of the OFL, ABC, and ACL are based on MRIP-FES data.

Motion carried without opposition.

NOAA General Counsel reviewed the codified text with the Committee, stating that the revisions to the codified text would exclude past fishing years from the rulemaking based on when the rule is drafted and submitted.

Research Set Aside (RSA) Presentations (Tab C, Nos. 6)

Mr. Jonathon Peros (New England Fishery Management Council [NEFMC] staff) presented the use of research set-aside (RSA) programs by the NEFMC (Tab C, No. 6a).

A Committee member inquired how research funds are raised in the RSA process. Mr. Peros explained that a researcher or academic institution works directly with a harvester to land poundage, and the revenue from the harvest is split between the harvester and researcher. Another Committee member asked how the administrative costs are covered. Mr. Peros stated that the NMFS Science Center budget must cover the administrative costs. The Committee member then asked if monies are split after the harvesters' costs, and Mr. Peros explained that the NEFMC is not involved in that part of the process. The Committee member asked what happens if there is a disagreement about the process and who is the mediator. Mr. Peros responded that the NEFMC is not involved in that process, except for setting the policy in the RSA program. SEFSC staff inquired how multi-year surveys are funded by an RSA program. Mr. Peros stated that, currently, two-year projects are allowed, but the NEFMC is considering lengthening that to three years. A Committee member noted, and Mr. Peros agreed, that an RSA program could be established to meet a Council's needs. The Committee member then commented that the species in NEFMC's RSA program are single-use, in contrast with mixed-use fisheries in the Gulf, and asked if Mr. Peros had any recommendations or advice to that end. Mr. Peros stated that one consideration is whether or not certain research needs could be met without an RSA program.

Staff inquired if the NEFMC had observed researchers working primarily with large harvesters, rather than working with small harvesters and potentially having to split the poundage among various harvesters. Mr. Peros responded that vessel size can factor in, but that opportunities can exist with smaller vessels. A Committee member asked if there were more private or public institutions participating. Mr. Peros responded that a mix of public and private institutions participated, with universities being more involved.

Next, Mr. Brandon Muffley (Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council [MAFMC] staff) presented on the use of RSA programs by the MAFMC (Tab C, No. 6b). Due to time constraints, Mr. Muffley will be available for questions Friday morning during Full Council.

Draft Amendment 33: Modifications to the Gulf of Mexico Migratory Group King Mackerel Sector Allocation (Tab C, No. 7)

Staff presented draft CMP Amendment 33 (Tab C, No. 7a), which proposes modifying the sector allocation of Gulf king mackerel. This amendment will also update the CMP fishery management plan (FMP) objectives.

A Committee member requested draft language for the CMP FMP objective similar to Reef Fish FMP objective #2, as well as a revised Purpose statement that references optimum yield. Staff will provide this revised language during Full Council.

Another Committee member noted that the draft amendment included an explanation for why an alternative was not included that used the 1975 – 1979 time series with MRIP-FES data and asked that staff provide that explanation verbally. SEFSC staff responded that estimates for the landings prior to 1981 are not available in any recreational currency.

Another Committee member requested further explanation of the percentages shown for the commercial sector in Table 2.1.5 of the draft amendment. Staff explained that the average assumed landings for the 2016/2017 – 2019/2020 fishing years under Model Simulation 2 (Appendix B of the draft amendment) represent 97.3% of the commercial ACL under Alternative 2 and 78.2% of the commercial ACL under Alternative 3, and that the average historical landings for the 2016/2017 – 2019/2020 fishing years represent 67.3% of the commercial ACL under Alternative 2 and 54.1% of the commercial ACL under Alternative 3. Staff noted the percentages do not necessarily represent what the commercial sector would be expected to harvest under the two alternatives.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.