

**Mackerel Committee Report
April 4, 2022
Mr. Kevin Anson – Vice Chair**

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

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.

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

Staff reviewed the framework amendment, which has a single action to consider modifying the catch levels for Gulf migratory group king mackerel (Gulf king mackerel). The SEDAR 38 update assessment and Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) review found that Gulf king mackerel is not overfished or undergoing overfishing. The spawning stock biomass (SSB) is currently above the minimum stock size threshold, but below the SSB at maximum sustainable yield, likely due to depressed recruitment over the last 10 years. The SSC recommendations for the overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) increase over the projection time period, reflective of the estimated annual increase in SSB as the stock builds towards SSB at MSY during that period.

A Committee member was concerned about the condition of the stock, and the pace of the development and implementation of catch advice. Another Committee member commented on the openings of the Bonnet Carré spillway in Louisiana, which can result in large influxes of freshwater in the northern Gulf. He asked whether the relationship between salinity in the northern Gulf and recruitment had been analyzed. Council staff replied that such an analysis was not done for the SEDAR 38 Update stock assessment, but could be examined for future assessments. The Committee discussed other possible alternatives to consider, including an averaged constant catch scenario, setting the catch level at the 2022/2023 fishing year values, and applying the Council's Annual Catch Limit (ACL)/Annual Catch Target (ACT) Control Rule to establish a buffer between the ABC and the total ACL. Council staff noted that the ACL/ACT Control Rule would create a 10% buffer between the total stock ABC and the total stock ACL. Council staff also verified that adding an alternative more conservative than Alternative 2 would not prevent the ability to take final action on the document at the June 2022 Council meeting.

Final Action: Amendment 34: Atlantic Migratory Group King Mackerel Catch Levels and Atlantic King and Spanish Mackerel Management Measures (Tab C, No. 6)

Ms. Christina Wiegand (South Atlantic Council staff) presented the amendment which would modify catch levels, sector allocations, and bag and possession limits for Atlantic migratory group king mackerel, as well as the requirement to land recreational Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel with heads and fins intact. Currently, both Councils concur on preferred alternatives to

the five actions included in the amendment. The South Atlantic Council approved the amendment for final action during its March 2022 meeting. The Committee reviewed the proposed codified text.

The Committee recommends and I so **move**: to recommend the Council approve **Amendment 34: Atlantic Migratory Group King Mackerel Catch Levels and Atlantic King and Spanish Mackerel Management Measures and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation, and deem the codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary changes in the document. The Council Chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and appropriate.**

Motion carried without opposition.

Other Business (Tab C, No. 7)

Council staff discussed the current regulations prohibiting the harvest of Gulf king mackerel via run-around gillnets in the Gulf Southern Zone on weekends and federal holidays. This regulation was implemented to better account for harvest via gillnets, as reporting on weekends and federal holidays would not be received and processed by NMFS until the next business day. The pace at which landings can come in from the gillnet fleet is such that quota overruns were possible under the commercial trip ticket system. Currently, the gillnet fleet communicates in real-time, including over the weekends and federal holidays, with NMFS staff regarding landings, and voluntarily ceases fishing activity once the Gulf Southern Zone Gillnet ACL is projected to be met. This more recent reporting method is later validated using commercial trip ticket and seafood dealer reports, and negates the need for the prohibition on fishing on weekends and federal holidays.

A Committee member was concerned about season duration if landings were allowed on weekends and holidays. Council staff noted that the season duration was not as important to the gillnet fishermen. The vessels used for gillnetting are also used for pulling stone crab and lobster traps, and while the gillnet gear is on the vessel, pulling traps cannot occur. Thus, if the weather does not allow for gillnet strikes on king mackerel, the vessel cannot fish, which represents lost income and inefficiency for the commercial fishermen.

The Committee recommends, and I so **move**, to direct staff to create a **Framework Amendment to eliminate weekend and holiday closures in the gillnet component of the mackerel fishery.**

Motion carried without opposition.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.