

**Mackerel Committee Report  
January 27, 2025  
Mr. Dakus Geeslin, Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda with the additions of discussion materials for king mackerel catch limits provided by a Committee member and clarifying discussion for the start date of fishery dependent data inputs for SEDAR 99 (**Tab C, No. 1**). The Committee also approved the minutes (**Tab C, No. 2**) of the June 2024 meeting as written.

***Gulf Stakeholder Coastal Migratory Pelagic (CMP) Engagement Meetings Summary (Tab C, No. 4)***

Staff provided summary comments gathered during its CMP Special Engagement Effort that aimed to gather information from fishermen on Spanish mackerel, king mackerel, and Cobia to inform future management. The effort gathered targeted feedback using a series of questions during three public webinars, through a public comment form, and through workshops with the Reef Fish and CMP Advisory Panels. Council staff reported that 45 written comments were received, and 8 members of the public participated in the virtual meetings. While only a few stakeholders participated virtually, their feedback was extensive and provided detailed insight into the health of all three stocks. The SAFMC liaison reported that their port meetings had limited virtual participation, but their in-person meetings were well attended.

***Spanish Mackerel Framework Action and Next Steps (Tab C, No 5)***

Council staff reviewed a draft framework action which considers several modifications to Spanish mackerel management measures, including catch limits, accountability measures, and the recreational bag limit. The stock was assessed through SEDAR 81 which provided updated catch advice, incorporated Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES), and had a terminal year of 2021. The stock was determined to not be overfished or experiencing overfishing.

The Committee was mixed on next steps for the document. Several Committee members stated that the known problematic issues with MRIP-FES made updating the catch advice difficult. The results of the MRIP-FES pilot study are not available to provide further context when comparing catch advice alternatives. Others contended that the catch advice within the document was the best scientific advice available and warranted Council action. The Committee decided to wait until receiving public comment before deciding whether to retain the current preferred alternatives or the action considering a reduction in the recreational bag limit.

***King Mackerel Management Measures and Next Steps (Tab C, Nos. 6a-d)***

Dr. Brendan Turley (Southeast Fisheries Science Center [SEFSC]) provided a presentation outlining available data sources that could inform stock dynamics for Gulf king mackerel. Broadly, the preliminary exploration indicates that environmental effects are likely contributing to the decline of the stock. Council staff also reviewed a framework action which would consider decreasing catch limits and the recreational bag limit. A Committee member stated that

any reductions in catch should be fairly distributed across the recreational fishery and the various commercial zones/gears. He provided a potential alternative that would incorporate sector-specific landings to inform proportional reductions as another option. The Committee also acknowledged that a reduction in the recreational bag limit was not likely to result in any substantial reduction in harvest.

The Committee discussed the timing of any management decisions. SEDAR 99 is scheduled to be reported to the Council in June 2026 with any management actions likely not forthcoming until 2027 or later. Discussion was varied with several Committee members desiring action to be taken before the completion of SEDAR 99. Those members stated that environmental conditions warranted some reduction in fishing mortality to conserve the spawning biomass. Other members expressed a desire to not make any management changes until the completion of the stock assessment.

The Committee reviewed the terms of reference for SEDAR 99. A Committee member asked for rationale for considering fishery dependent data back to the 1920s. He inquired about starting those data streams in the 1980s when data collection programs were more consistent and recommended generating two models with differing starting dates for comparison. SEFSC staff indicated that including data as far back as practicable, such that the stock is assumed to be unfished prior to that date, avoids having to make key assumptions about the state of the stock after many years of fishing. However, sensitivity runs could be generated to evaluate the implications of the assumptions regarding model start date. Ultimately, the Committee decided to wait to discuss next steps for king mackerel until after public comment.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.