

## INTERSTATE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

### ***Cobia***



#### **Species Range**

Coastwide, most abundant in U.S. waters from the Chesapeake Bay south through the Gulf of Mexico.

#### **Management Unit**

Rhode Island – Georgia

#### **Stock Status**

Two cobia stocks are found off the U.S. Atlantic coast: Atlantic cobia and Gulf of Mexico Migratory Group (Gulf cobia). Gulf cobia occur throughout the Gulf of Mexico and extend to Florida’s east coast, while Atlantic cobia occur from Georgia north. As of 2019, the Atlantic cobia stock is managed solely by the Commission.

In 2020, SEDAR 58 was approved by the Board for management use for Atlantic cobia. This new benchmark stock assessment provided new reference points and determined that the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The assessment used the recalibrated recreational catch estimates from MRIP. The new estimates yielded much higher estimates of the biomass and spawning stock biomass compared to the previous stock assessment. The increase in biomass lead to increased quotas for both the recreational and commercial fisheries, and initiated the development of Addendum I to Amendment 1.

#### **Involved States and Jurisdictions**

RI, NJ, DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, NMFS, SAFMC

#### **Active Boards/Committees**

Coastal Pelagics Management Board, Cobia Technical Committee, Cobia Plan Review Team, Cobia Plan Development Team, Cobia Stock Assessment Subcommittee, South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel

#### **Chairs**

Board, Chair – Spud Woodward (1/2024); Vice-Chair – Lynn Fegley  
Technical Committee, Chair – Angela Giuliano (7/19); Vice-Chair – Vacant  
Advisory Panel, Chair – Craig Freeman (10/2019)

#### **Staff Lead**

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## **Management Plan History**

### **[Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Migratory Group \(AMG\) \(November 2017\)](#)**

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) adopted an interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Atlantic Migratory Group of cobia (Atlantic cobia) in 2017 (ASMFC, 2017). Prior to the FMP, federal management was through the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (SAFMC) Fishery Management Plan for Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources (CMP FMP), while New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina had regulations for their respective state waters.

The FMP established a complementary management approach between the ASMFC and SAFMC. Under the ASMFC, Atlantic cobia are managed as part of the South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board (Board). Through the FMP, regulations for states with a declared interest were required to reflect several measures established federally through the CMP FMP.

### **Amendment 31 to the CMP FMP (March 2019)**

In March, 2019, Regulatory Amendment 31 to the CMP FMP became effective. This removed Atlantic cobia from the CMP FMP, resulting in management solely through the ASMFC.

### **[Amendment 1 \(August 2019\)](#)**

In August, 2019, the Board approved Amendment 1 to reflect removal of Atlantic cobia from the CMP FMP, assume management responsibilities previously accomplished through the SAFMC and CMP FMP, and establish recommendations for measures in federal waters. Amendment 1 stated requirements are to be implemented by July, 2020.

Amendment 1 maintains many regulations of the original Commission FMP and previous CMP FMP. These include a 36-inch fork length (or 40 inch total length) recreational minimum size limit, 1 fish per person recreational bag limit, a recreational daily vessel limit not to exceed 6 fish per vessel, a 33-inch fork length (or 37-inch total length) commercial minimum size limit, and a commercial possession limit of 2 cobia per person not to exceed 6 cobia per vessel.

### **[Addendum I \(October 2020\)](#)**

In response to revised MRIP numbers and the updated stock assessment in 2020, the board initiated Addendum I. The Addendum changes the allocation of the resource between the recreational and commercial fisheries from 92% and 8% respectively to 96% and 4% respectively. The Addendum also modified the calculation of the commercial trigger, which determines when the commercial season closes. The new trigger calculates the closure trigger based on the recent 5 years of harvest, whereas the prior trigger was dependent on recent harvests. Changes to *de minimis* measures changed the set aside 4% of the commercial quota exclusively for *de minimis* states, and increased the minimum size of recreationally caught cobia to 33 inches fork length.

**Pending Management Action**

In October 2023, the Board initiated an addendum to address recreational Atlantic cobia quota reallocation in response to a Technical Committee report on recent trends in state and regional cobia landings compared to state harvest targets. The report noted harvest patterns since 2015 appear to have changed such that a majority of cobia harvest now occurs outside of the Southeast region. The Board recommended the draft addendum explore options to consider the seasonality of the species in various regions, reevaluate what a soft target is, and if state-by-state soft targets are appropriate for managing pulse fisheries like Atlantic cobia. The Board will review the draft addendum and consider approving it for public comment in May 2024.