



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

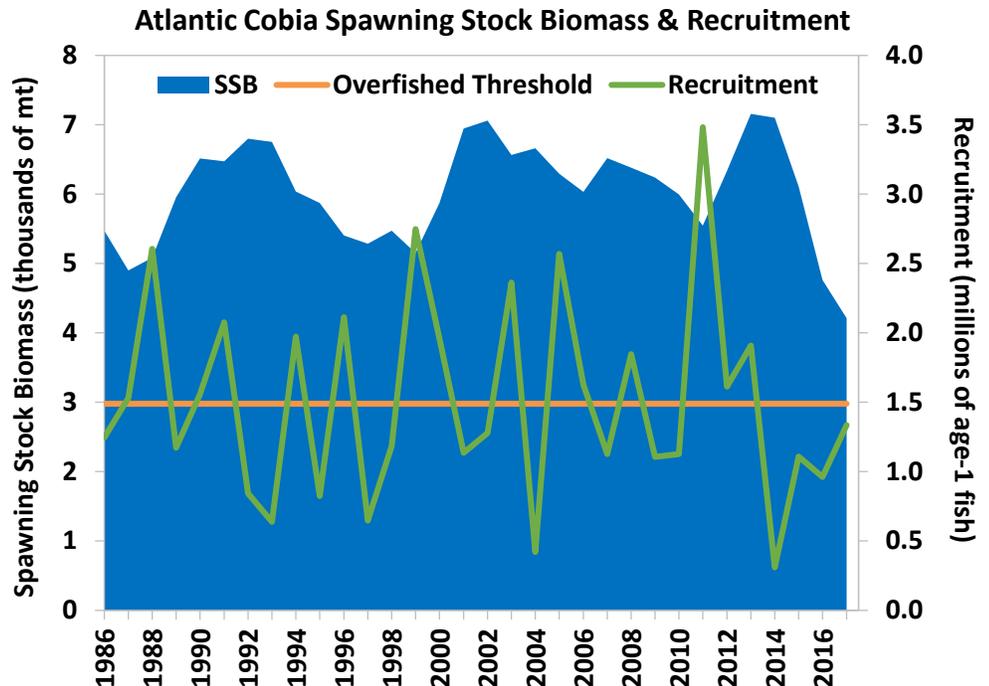
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Atlantic Cobia Benchmark Stock Assessment Finds Resource Not Overfished Nor Experiencing Overfishing South Atlantic Board Sets Harvest Specifications & Initiates Addendum

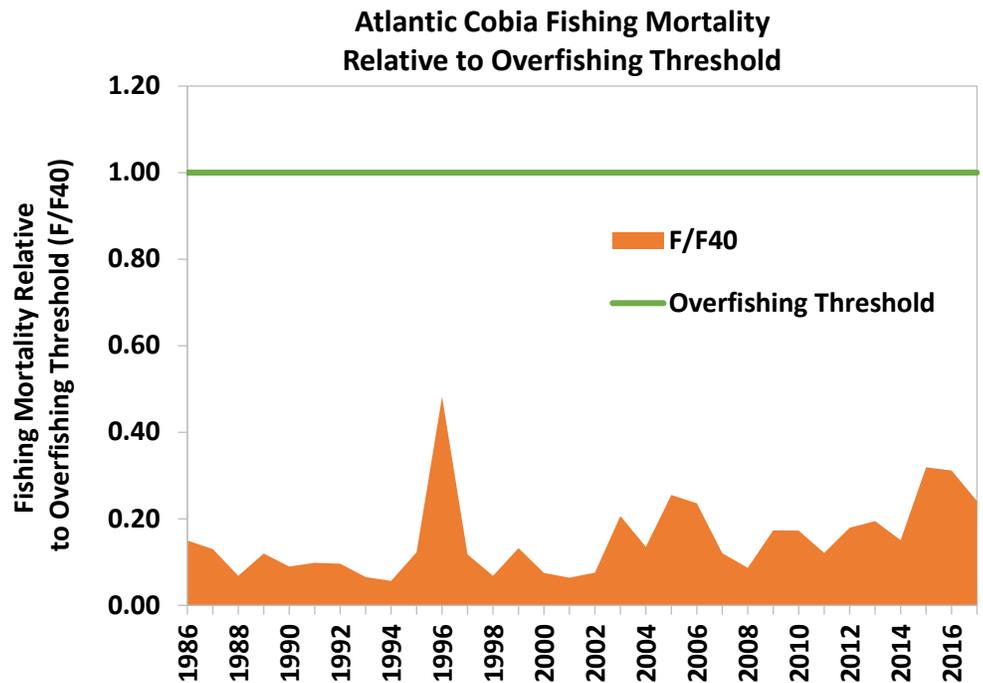
Arlington, VA – The Commission’s South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board accepted the Atlantic Cobia Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report, including new reference points, for management use. The assessment, which was conducted through the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process, evaluated the Atlantic stock of cobia, which extends from the Georgia/Florida border north. Assessment results indicate the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.

Spawning stock biomass (SSB) has been above the overfished threshold throughout the timeframe (1986-2017), indicating the coastwide stock is not overfished. SSB has shown several large increases following years of high recruitment, the most recent following the 2011 recruitment peak, with the largest SSB in the time series occurring in 2013. These peaks in SSB have been followed by declines when recruitment moves back towards its average. While SSB has undergone a step decline since the 2013 peak, SSB remains above the overfished threshold.



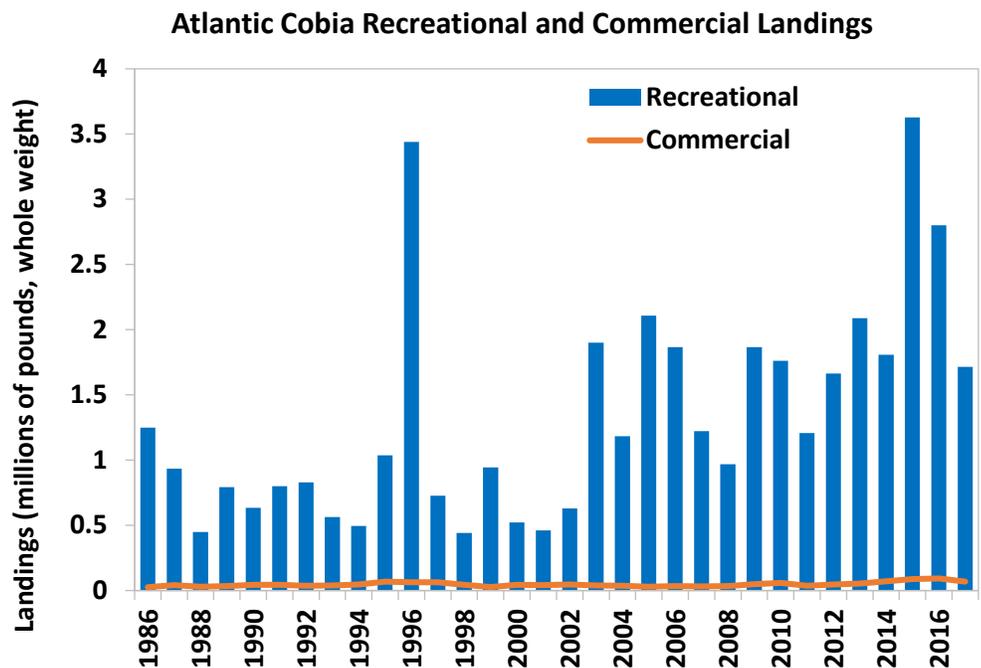
The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

This assessment used re-calibrated recreational catch data from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Landings of Atlantic cobia have generally increased since the 1980s, primarily driven by the recreational fishery, which accounts for about 96% of the total landings. Fishing mortality showed some increase in the most recent years, but did not approach the overfishing threshold, indicating the coastwide stock has not undergone overfishing during the assessment timeframe.



Several projections of the population under different harvest scenarios were conducted, describing predicted trends in biomass and the probability of the stock becoming overfished through 2024. The TC recommended harvest quota levels to the Board based on projections that maintained a low probability of the stock becoming overfished and did not result in consistent declines in SSB. Based on the assessment results and harvest projections, the Board approved an annual total harvest quota of 80,112 fish for the 2020-2022 fishing seasons. The Board maintained current recreational measures for 2020 while the states consider potential regulatory changes for future years.

The Board also discussed recreational/commercial allocation as established by Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Atlantic Migratory Group Cobia, which currently allocates 92% of the total quota to the recreational fishery and 8% to the commercial fishery. These percentages were originally based on historical harvest from each sector within a period of reference years, prior to the re-calibration of MRIP estimates. With the re-calibration of the recreational data, the percentages of harvest in the reference period changed, resulting in the current commercial allocation percentage being higher than



its percentage of total harvest during the reference period. In response to this, the Board initiated an addendum to reevaluate allocation. The Board also noted potential regulatory inconsistencies among *de minimis* states and determined the *de minimis* measures should be reconsidered through the addendum.

The SEDAR 58 Report is available at

http://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/5e3d99a3SEDAR58_AtlCobiaAssessment_PeerReviewReport.pdf.

An overview will be available on the Commission's website, www.asmfc.org, on the Cobia page under Stock Assessment Reports. For more information, please contact Dr. Mike Schmidtke, FMP Coordinator, at mschmidtke@asmfc.org.

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