



# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Coastal Pelagics Management Board

**FROM:** South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel

**DATE:** July 30, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Advisory Panel Recommendations on Cobia Draft Addendum II Options

The South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar on July 25, 2024 to discuss AP recommendations on the proposed options in Atlantic Cobia Draft Addendum II to Amendment 1. ASMFC staff provided the AP with an overview of the draft addendum background, proposed options, and a summary of public comments. The following is a summary of the AP's recommended options and rationale.

### AP Members in Attendance

Craig Freeman (AP Chair, VA for-hire/rec./comm.)  
Tom Powers (VA recreational)  
Mary Ellon Ballance (NC commercial)  
Bernie McCants (NC recreational)  
Glenn Skinner (NC commercial)

ASMFC Staff: Emilie Franke, Tracy Bauer

Public Attendees: Chris Batsavage (NC Board Member), Alan Bianchi (NC staff)

### ***Section 3.1 Recreational Allocation Framework***

4 AP members noted support for status quo Option A: Status quo state allocations based on 2006-2015 data for the following reasons:

- Management should not change while a stock assessment is ongoing. Allocations can be reevaluated after the current stock assessment.
- Based on the last stock assessment, overfishing was not occurring so there is no reason to change management before the next assessment.
- Changing management now and then changing it again after the next assessment (i.e., constantly changing management) is what the Board was trying to avoid, and would be hard on stakeholders, especially given the uncertain data.
- There is concern about the relatively short six-year data timeframe (2018-2023) proposed in the updated allocations with more recent data. For a pulse fishery like cobia

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with a low number of MRIP angler intercepts, bad weather could result in low harvest estimates for some years which could distort the average. With all the data uncertainty, a longer time period should be used for allocations. There is particular concern about the effects of weather on North Carolina effort and harvest.

1 AP member noted support for state allocations between Option A. status quo and Option B. state allocations with more recent data for the following reasons:

- Virginia's allocation could increase by some amount, but not to the full extent proposed in Option B. In any case, Virginia's measures should be not be loosened at this point.
- There is concern that under a coastwide allocation framework (i.e., no state or regional allocations), Virginia harvest may increase even more.

### ***Section 3.2 Future Updates to Allocations***

No specific AP comments on options in this section.

### ***Section 3.3 Data Uncertainty in Recreational Landings Evaluations***

2 AP members noted support for Option B: 5-year average used for harvest target evaluations. They noted more data are better, and the additional data years would balance years affected by weather conditions and related changes in effort, especially for states like North Carolina when cobia are only available for a short period of time.

1 AP member also noted support for the confidence interval approach in the future.

### ***Section 3.4 Overage Response for Recreational Landings Evaluations***

1 AP member noted he would typically support Option B (no reduction for overage state if another state is under and coastwide harvest is under), but is not sure whether this should be supported for cobia due to data uncertainty. It makes sense to account for how other states perform and if the coastwide harvest is sustainable, but it is questionable whether we can determine how close harvest is to the targets due to uncertainty.

### ***Section 3.5 Timeline for Setting Management Measures***

1 AP member noted support for Option B: set measures for up to 5 years in order to align management with the stock assessments. It requires resources to do these evaluations, and the evaluations should be done at this longer time interval to match when the most assessment information is available.

### ***General Comments***

As noted under Section 3.1, there was general AP concern and questions about why the Board is considering changing recreational allocation in 2025 before the current stock assessment is complete, which will result in another management change in 2026 or 2027. AP members noted that changing management multiple times within a few years is difficult for stakeholders, and it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of management measures that are only in place for a short period of time, especially given the high uncertainty.

There is ongoing concern about the high uncertainty around MRIP data, and the low number of angler intercepts for cobia and very few anglers being interviewed. Virginia had mandatory cobia harvest reporting for a few years, but the program was ended because it was difficult to implement and could not be used in the stock assessment.

AP members also noted interest in understanding the release component of the fishery, including how many cobia are released and the need for information on release mortality rates (e.g., is the release mortality rate higher during the summer?). The release mortality rate used in the previous stock assessment was 5%.