



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

TO: ISFMP Policy Board

FROM: Emilie Franke, FMP Coordinator and Patrick Campfield, Science Director

DATE: October 21, 2025

SUBJECT: Update on Cobia Stock Assessment

A stock assessment for Atlantic cobia began in March 2024 through the SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process with an expected completion date in Fall 2025. From March through September 2024, SEDAR coordinated several webinars on data availability for fishery removals, life history information, and indices. However, starting in September 2024 the lead assessment analyst from the NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) was no longer available, causing the assessment to be paused until a new lead analyst was identified. The Coastal Pelagics Board received an update during the October 2024 Annual Meeting on the paused assessment.

In late summer 2025, a new lead analyst, Dr. Amy Schueller (NOAA SEFSC), was identified to begin work on the assessment in early 2026. Additionally, it was decided the Commission will lead the assessment process (Data, Methods, and Assessment Workshops) and SEDAR will coordinate a Peer Review Workshop ([SEDAR 95](#)). This is similar to the process used for red drum and menhaden ecological reference point assessments.

Staff are currently working to re-start the assessment and transition to the Commission assessment process. This includes forming a Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) and refining the previously approved Terms of Reference (TORs) from the SEDAR format to the Commission format. Emilie Franke and Chelsea Tuohy (ASMFC) will provide administrative support for the assessment as FMP Coordinators. Dr. CJ Schlick (SCDNR) will provide analytical support to the assessment, similar to the role of Commission assessment scientists. A SAS Chair will be elected once the SAS is formed.

With the lead analyst starting in early 2026, the expected completion date for the assessment is 2027. One factor affecting the expected completion date is the terminal year of the assessment. If the terminal year is 2024 and uses the current MRIP FES estimates, the assessment would potentially be completed by early-mid 2027. If the terminal year is 2025 and incorporates the recalibrated MRIP FES data, which are expected to be available mid-2026, the assessment would potentially be completed by mid-late 2027. Staff are working to confirm the lead analyst's availability for the mid-late 2027 timeline. Other factors affecting the timeline include any challenges with potential modeling approaches, as cobia is a relatively data-limited species requiring development of a new index of abundance, if possible.

Staff recognize the assessment will not be completed in time to inform 2027 management, which the Board will need to discuss in the coming year as the current specifications expire at the end of 2026. The assessment timeline with completion in 2027 to inform 2028 management is most realistic. The timeline allows for use of recalibrated MRIP data, participation by the new lead analyst, and development of new assessment models if needed.

Staff anticipates the following next steps to get the assessment re-started:

- Staff continue working with Coastal Pelagics Board members to identify SAS nominees;
- Coastal Pelagics Board considers SAS membership via email vote in November;
- Joint TC-SAS call in November to discuss the assessment process and updated TORs;
- Introductory data webinars with lead analyst in January/February;
- Coastal Pelagics Board considers updated TORs for approval at the 2026 Winter Meeting;
- Assessment work continues through 2026 with the Data, Methods, and Assessment Workshops.