Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Coastal Pelagics Management Board

February 4, 2026
10:15 – 11:45 a.m.

Draft Agenda

The times listed are approximate; the order in which these items will be taken is subject to change; other items may be added as necessary.

1.	Welcome/Call to Order *(R. Beal)*	10:15 a.m.
2.	Board Consent • Approval of Agenda • Approval of Proceedings from October 2024	10:15 a.m.
3.	Public Comment	10:20 a.m.
4.	Review and Consider Approval of 2027 Atlantic Cobia Stock Assessment Terms of Reference *(A. Giuliano)* **Action**	10:30 a.m.
5.	Review Next Steps and Timeline for Atlantic Cobia Management • Presentation of Specification Setting Process, Recreational Management Measures, and Confidence Interval Approach *(E. Franke)* • Provide Guidance to Cobia Technical Committee on Upcoming Tasks If Needed	10:50 a.m.
6.	Consider Approval of Atlantic Cobia FMP Review and State Compliance for the 2024 Fishing Year *(E. Franke)* **Action**	11:20 a.m.
7.	Consider Approval of Spanish Mackerel FMP Review and State Compliance for the 2023 and 2024 Fishing Years *(E. Franke)* **Action**	11:25 a.m.
8.	Update from South Atlantic Fishery Management Council on Spanish Mackerel Council Activity *(C. Wiegand)*	11:30 a.m.
9.	Review and Populate Spanish Mackerel Plan Review Team Membership *(E. Franke)* **Action**	11:35 a.m.
10.	Review and Populate Advisory Panel Membership *(T. Berger)* **Action**	11:40 a.m.
11.	Elect Vice-Chair **Action**	11:45 a.m.
12.	Other Business/Adjourn	11:45 a.m.

The meeting will be held at The Westin Crystal City (1800 Richmond Highway, Arlington, VA; 703.486.1111) and via webinar; click here for details.

MEETING OVERVIEW

Coastal Pelagics Management Board
February 4, 2026
10:15 – 11:45 a.m.

Chair: Spud Woodward (GA) Assumed Chairmanship: 1/24	Technical Committee Chair: Cobia: Angela Giuliano (MD) Spanish Mackerel: Vacant	Law Enforcement Committee Rep: Capt. Scott Pearce (FL)
Vice Chair: Vacant	Advisory Panel Chair: Craig Freeman (VA)	Previous Board Meeting: October 22, 2024
Voting Members: RI, NY, NJ, DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, SAFMC, NMFS (13 votes)		

2. Board Consent

- Approval of Agenda
- Approval of Proceedings from October 2024

3. Public Comment – At the beginning of the meeting, public comment will be taken on items not on the agenda. Individuals that wish to speak at this time must sign-in at the beginning of the meeting. For agenda items that have already gone out for public hearing and/or have had a public comment period that has closed, the Board Chair may determine that additional public comment will not provide additional information. In this circumstance, the Chair will not allow additional public comment on an issue. For agenda items that the public has not had a chance to provide input, the Board Chair may allow limited opportunity for comment. The Board Chair has the discretion to limit the number of speakers and/or the length of each comment.

4. 2027 Stock Assessment for Atlantic Cobia (10:30-10:50 a.m.) Action

Background

- A stock assessment for Atlantic cobia will begin in early 2026 with anticipated completion and peer review in 2027.
- The Commission will lead the assessment process (Data, Methods, and Assessment Workshops) and the SouthEast Data Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) will coordinate a Peer Review Workshop (SEDAR 107).
- The Cobia Technical Committee (TC) and Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) met in December 2025 to develop draft terms of reference for Board consideration **(Briefing Materials)**.

Presentations

- Draft Terms of Reference by A. Giuliano

Board action for consideration at this meeting

- Approve the Terms of Reference for the 2027 Cobia Stock Assessment.

5. Next Steps and Timeline for Atlantic Cobia Management (10:50-11:20 a.m.)

Background

- With 2024-2026 Atlantic cobia specifications expiring at the end of this year and with the upcoming stock assessment and revised MRIP data, there are potential management actions and timelines for the Board to consider in the coming months **(Briefing Materials)**.
- Per the FMP, new harvest specifications for 2027 must be set by the 2026 Annual Meeting. The Board can set specifications for up to five years.
- Per the FMP, regional recreational landings are evaluated against recreational harvest targets at the same time as the specification process.
- Other considerations include the stock assessment timeline, which is anticipated to inform 2028 management measures, and the revised MRIP time series expected in 2026, which could change the current regional recreational allocations.
- Addendum II also includes a provision allowing the Board to switch from the current rolling average approach to a confidence interval approach for evaluating recreational harvest against targets, if desired by the Board.

Presentations

- Overview of Next Steps and Timeline for Atlantic Cobia Management by E. Franke

Board guidance for consideration at this meeting

- Guidance to the Technical Committee on upcoming tasks if needed.

6. Atlantic Cobia Fishery Management Plan Review (11:20-11:25 a.m.) Action

Background

- State Compliance Reports were due on July 1, 2025.
- The Plan Review Team reviewed each state report and compiled the annual FMP Review **(Briefing Materials).**
- Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Georgia, and Florida have requested and meet the requirements for *de minimis.*

Presentations

- Overview of the Atlantic Cobia FMP Review Report by E. Franke

Board actions for consideration at this meeting

- Accept 2025 FMP Review and State Compliance Reports for the 2024 Fishing Year for Atlantic Cobia.
- Approve *de minimis* requests.

7. Spanish Mackerel Fishery Management Plan Review (11:25-11:30 a.m.) Action

Background

- State Compliance Reports were due on October 1, 2024 and October 1, 2025.
- The Plan Review Team reviewed each state report and compiled the FMP Review for both years **(Briefing Materials).**
- Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, and Georgia have requested and meet the requirements for *de minimis.*

Presentations

- Overview of the Spanish Mackerel FMP Review Report by E. Franke

Board actions for consideration at this meeting

- Accept 2025 FMP Review and State Compliance Reports for the 2023 and 2024 Fishing Years for Spanish Mackerel.
- Approve *de minimis* requests.

8. Update from South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (11:30-11:35 a.m.)

Background

- The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) has been considering how to respond to recommendations from the 2024 Mackerel Port Meetings as well as the most recent Spanish mackerel stock assessment (SEDAR 78).
- In June 2025, the SAFMC decided to postpone action until the revised MRIP time series is available and to consider whether the next stock assessment could occur sooner on the SEDAR schedule **(Briefing Materials)**.

Presentations

- Update from SAFMC by C. Wiegand

9. Spanish Mackerel Plan Review Team Membership (11:35-11:40 a.m.) Action

Background

- Sara Pace from North Carolina and Chris McDonough from South Carolina have been nominated to the Spanish Mackerel Plan Review Team (PRT).

Presentations

- Nominations by E. Franke

Board actions for consideration at this meeting

- Approve PRT nominations.

10. South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel Membership (11:40-11:45 a.m.) Action

Background

- Robert Hale from Georgia has been nominated to the South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel

Presentations

- Nomination by T. Berger

Board actions for consideration at this meeting

- Approve Advisory Panel nomination.

11. Elect Vice Chair (11:40-11:45 a.m.) Action

Background

- Spud Woodward's chairmanship is ending in February 2026.
- The vice chair seat is currently vacant.

Board actions for consideration at this meeting

- Elect Vice Chair

12. Other Business/Adjourn (11:45 a.m.)

Coastal Pelagics (Cobia and Spanish Mackerel)

Activity level: Moderate

Committee Overlap Score: Moderate

Committee Task List

- Cobia TC – develop recommendation for 2027 specifications; address evaluation of recreational harvest against regional targets to inform 2027 recreational measures
- Cobia SAS – Conduct 2027 stock assessment
- Cobia TC/PRT – July 1: Compliance Reports Due
- Spanish Mackerel TC/PRT – October 1: Compliance Reports Due

Technical Committee Members:

Cobia TC: Angela Giuliano (MD, Chair), Nichole Ares (RI), Zachary Schuller (NY), Jamie Darrow (NJ), Catherine Wilhelm (VA), Melinda Lambert (NC), Justin Yost (SC), Chris Kalinowsky (GA), Christina Wiegand (SAFMC), Michael Larkin (SERO)

Spanish Mackerel TC: Reuben Macfarlan (RI), Zachary Schuller (NY), Jamie Darrow (NJ), Devon Scott (DE), Harry Rickabaugh (MD), Ingrid Braun-Ricks (PRFC), Catherine Wilhelm (VA), Sara Pace (NC), Keyaira Morgan (SC), Jeff Renchen (FL), Christina Wiegand (SAFMC)

Plan Review Team Members:

Cobia PRT: Angela Giuliano (MD), Chris McDonough (SC), Emilie Franke (ASMFC)

Spanish Mackerel PRT: JA MacFarlan (RI), Chris Davis (VA), Sara Pace (NC nominee), Chris McDonough (SC nominee), Britney Hall (GA), Marina Owens (FL), Christina Wiegand (SAFMC), John Hadley (SAFMC), Emilie Franke (ASMFC)

Stock Assessment Subcommittee Members:

Cobia SAS: Amy Schueller (NOAA), Nichole Ares (RI), Angela Giuliano (MD), Kevin Weng (VIMS), Brad Johnson (NC), Justin Yost (SC), Jimmy Kilfoil (SC), CJ Schlick (SC/ASMFC)

DRAFT PROCEEDINGS OF THE

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

COASTAL PELAGICS MANAGEMENT BOARD

The Westin
Annapolis, Maryland
Hybrid Meeting

October 22, 2024

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INDEX OF MOTIONS

1. **Approval of agenda** by consent (Page 1).

2. **Approval of Proceedings of August 2024** by consent (Page 1).

3. **Move to approve the Cobia Technical Committee methodology for developing recreational management options to meet the northern region reduction. States in the northern region will select a set of measures for 2025-2026 and submit implementation plans for Board consideration by January 1, 2025. States in the northern region must implement the new measures by April, 1, 2025. If states in the northern region cannot come to a consensus on which measures to implement, a virtual Board meeting will be scheduled to select measures.** (Page 12). Motion by Pat Geer; second by Joe Cimino. Motion passes by consent with 3 abstentions (SC, GA, FL) (Page 13).

4. **Move to adjourn** by consent (Page 18).

ATTENDANCE

Board Members

Jason McNamee, RI (AA)
Eric Reid, RI, proxy for Sen. Sosnowski (LA)
David Borden, RI (GA)
Jesse Hornstein, NY, proxy for Marty Gary (AA)
Jim Gilmore, NY, proxy for Assy. Thiele (LA)
S. Curatolo Wagemann, NY, proxy for E. Hasbrouck (GA)
Joe Cimino, NJ (AA)
Adam Nowalsky, NJ, proxy for Sen. Gopal (LA)
Jeff Kaelin, NJ (GA)
John Clark, DE (AA)
Roy Miller, DE (GA)
Lynn Fegley, MD (AA)
David Sikorski, MD, proxy for Del. Stein (LA)
Russ Dize, MD (GA)
Pat Geer, VA, proxy for Jamie Green (AA)
James Minor, VA (GA)
Chris Batsavage, NC, proxy for K. Rawls (AA)
Chad Thomas, NC, proxy for Rep. Wray (LA)
Jerry Mannen, NC (GA)
Ben Dyar, SC, proxy for Blaik Keppler (AA)
Mel Bell, SC, proxy for Sen. Cromer (LA)
Malcolm Rhodes, SC (GA)
Doug Haymans, GA (AA)
Spud Woodward, GA (GA)
Erika Burgess, FL, proxy for J. McCawley (AA)
Gary Jennings, FL (GA)
Ron Owens, PRFC
John Carmichael, SAFMC
Jack McGovern, NMFS

(AA = Administrative Appointee; GA = Governor Appointee; LA = Legislative Appointee)

Ex-Officio Members

Angelia Giuliano, Technical Committee Chair

Staff

Bob Beal
Toni Kerns
Tina Berger
Madeline Musante
Caitlin Starks
Jeff Kipp
Tracy Bauer
James Boyle
Katie Drew
Jainita Patel
Emilie Franke
Chelsea Tuohy

The Coastal Pelagics Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission convened in the Capitol Ballroom via hybrid meeting, in-person and webinar; Tuesday, October 22, 2024, and was called to order at 12:30 p.m. by Chair Spud Woodward.

CALL TO ORDER

CHAIR SPUD WOODWARD: I'm going to go ahead and call the meeting of the Coastal Pelagics Management Board to order. For those of you that are online, this is Spud Woodward; Georgia's Governor's Appointee Commissioner and current chair of the Coastal Pelagics Management Board.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

CHAIR WOODWARD: Our first item of business is Approval of the Agenda. Are there any modifications or suggested additions to the agenda? Seeing none; we'll consider the agenda accepted by unanimous consent.

APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS

CHAIR WOODWARD: You also have the proceedings from the August, 2024 meeting of this Board. Are there any corrections, edits, modifications to those minutes? Any opposition to accepting those minutes that are presented? Seeing none; we'll consider those accepted by unanimous consent.

PUBLIC COMMENT

CHAIR WOODWARD: At this time, we open up for public comment on any items for this Board that are not on the agenda. Is there any public comment from any one in the room? I don't see any, anybody online? We don't have anybody online, so we'll move "along."

UPDATE ON SEDAR 95 STOCK ASSESSMENT FOR ATLANTIC COBIA

CHAIR WOODWARD: Our next item is an update on SEDAR 95, which is our Planned Stock Assessment for Atlantic Migratory Group Cobia, and I'm going to turn that over to Pat Campfield.

MR. PATRICK A. CAMPFIELD: This will be quick. Is there a file we can put up, or should we just skip that? In short, the Cobia Stock Assessment through the SEDAR process had started, was scheduled for completion about a year from now, November of 2025. On the pro side, a number of data webinars, a look at life history data indices, removals occurred over the summer.

Showing progress and perhaps new analytical or modeling possibilities for getting creative with the Cobia Stock Assessment. However, the lead analysist from the National Marine Fisheries Service and Southeast Science Center that was assigned to cobia changed jobs and left NMFS, and so obviously that puts a stop to the next steps in the assessment to begin the cobia risk analyses.

In short, the bottom line is, the assessment will be delayed at least a year, to be finished in late 2026 if we wait for a new analyst from NMFS, with advice to you all, to the management board in early 2027. We recognize this is a significant delay, but with the loss of that lead analyst we're in a bit of a fix. I think that's all, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Any questions for Pat? Joe Cimino.

MR. JOE CIMINO: More of a comment. We have several species that are highly recreational dependent, and as we talked about with black drum, you know the importance of aligning these assessments with the new MRIP data. I really don't see any value in pushing this assessment ahead of newly calibrated peer reviewed MRIP estimates. I realize that puts us in a hell of a spot, because I think the terminal year of the last assessment was '17, '18.

We might potentially be looking at a decade out from the terminal year of the last assessment. With that said, I would fully support not fully going through the assessment to peer review, until we get the recalibrated MRIP estimates. But if there is anything that the TC or Stock Assessment

Subcommittee could recommend, as a way to kind of gauge where we are in the effort of this fishery, and provide some management guidance. I would fully support that as well.

MS. EMILIE FRANKE: I guess just to respond to that a little bit. I think the TC could, we'll have to meet in 2026 to talk about the 2027 through up to 2031 specs, and in the past the TC has requested additional projections based on the old assessment from NOAA, but they weren't able to provide any. The TC could talk about maybe any analyses they could do in the interim, but I think it might be pretty limited.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Yes, I think everybody shares your frustration, Joe. I know that the demand seems to always exceed capacity. You know we created a pretty high demand process here, and feeding it with timely, trustworthy information seems to be a challenge across the board. This one, unfortunately, seems to be falling into the same trap. I guess a question I have is, do we have any idea of when it will be staffed back up and the machine will go back to turning again?

MR. CAMPFIELD: In communicating with Eric Williams at the Southeast Center in the last couple of weeks, they are going to put an announcement out, he said in about a month. But we'll see how it goes from there. I think Eric's suggestion was about a year from now, fall of 2025 is when they would be hired.

Trained up familiar with BAM and some of the other models that have been used for cobia before. We might be able to plug into the assessment process. That would be the earliest. He also provided a caveat that it could take another six months after that, depending on who they hire.

CHAIR WOODWARD: What's our latest forecast for the FES bias study results, if possible, I guess changes in catch estimates from the past. Do you have anything on that? I'm trying to get at what Joe is talking about. If we hit the pause button, how long is that pause going to be, and when would it be realistic for this Board to expect updated stock status information and corresponding catch level recommendations? I'm not going to hold you to it, I'm not going to make you sign anything, I'm just curious.

MR. CAMPFIELD: Others around the room may have more authority, certainly from NMFS, and my understanding is that pilot study will be finished late 2026. Is that right? Again, that will be a while before the essentially changed NMRIP numbers are out.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I guess what it comes down to, what is the comfort level in something like this. We don't have control over a lot of it, but what is our comfort level in terms of, and as Emilie was saying, I think your TC is going to struggle, the information that they would be using to make projections is getting pretty doggone stale. It's going to be of questionable value.

We may not have a lot of choice in this matter, but we may just be left at status quo for a while. But I guess we'll just see how this proceeds, and if we can get anything that helps us have a better context for where we are and where we need to be going, we'll certainly try to do it. Any further questions of comments on this? Lynn.

MS. LYNN FEGLEY: It might be in a side, but I know we talked around the Policy Board or the Executive Committee about the issues, sort of globally with a dearth of stock assessment scientists. I'm just kind of wondering if there was any inkling, do we have people coming out, are they going to get good applicants? I mean I'm just curious as it happens, if we're finding people to come up and take these jobs.

MR. CAMPFIELD: I'll answer delicately that at least for the Commission Stock Assessment Scientists, we have a well-known pipeline or recruitment, various universities, and population dynamics modeling labs that we recruit from. It's been successful to date. I think all of the stock assessment enterprises on our coast and around the country pull from similar

locations. But there is a pipeline, it's not overly abundant, but it exists.

CHAIR WOODWARD: All right, John Carmichael.

MR. JOHN CARMICHAEL: Then on the FES, we got a presentation at the September Council meeting and MRIP says they are still on track to anticipate having the calibrated data finalized spring of '26, so completing the study, doing the analysis, and then calibrating things as they need to. They are saying early '26 hopefully.

It sounds like the timing of this assessment might be so close that you decide to wait and get that new information in there. I mean if they're not going to have someone ready to even start on it until '25, I would suspect the TC and others would at least want to advance the terminal year over where it is now, you don't want to go into the assessment three or four years behind.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Jay.

DR. JASON McNAMEE: Yes, so the timing of the recreational information. I'm not kind of factoring that in here, but I wonder, so Lynn's comment I thought was a good one, and I wondered, has there been an attempt, so if somebody left at NOAA there is potentially a little slack in the budget there. I was wondering, could NRP be put out to one of these universities, just to have an assessment done in the interim here. They can usually operate pretty quickly, if you kind of set the parameters up that way. Just trying to get creative here. That's a long time to go without an assessment, and to use projections that are that old is not great.

MR. CAMPFIELD: Yes, thanks for the creative suggestion and idea, Jay. That has worked for other stock assessments. I think we did that in a similar fashion for weakfish a number of years ago. I guess the question is, who pays for it. I don't know if we want to get into that this afternoon.

But we did ask leadership within the Southeast Science Center, and at least for their responsibilities they said they are fast tracking this replacement using their funds for those kinds of stock assessment positions. That avenue has been answered. But we haven't explored it at the Commission level for a variety of reasons.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I do have an offering plate up here we can circulate around with the sign-in sheet if folks want to make a donation. It's a relevant question, and I think back to Lynn's comments is, it's not only the lead scientist, but it's all the supporting, you know cast of characters it takes to pull off a SEDAR or one of those. I mean that's the other limiting factor is that additional supporting capacity. Those folks are working at pretty high-capacity demand too. We've set up a high demand system, and we continue to struggle to feed it.

It means you've got to make difficult priority decisions. I know it's certainly the federal, that's the case, when you're dealing with multiple species. I guess we'll see if the Science Center is actually able to get somebody on staff expeditiously, and this timeline that John described, kind of it may just sync itself up and we may be left not in a desirable position, but in a necessary position, like the aggregate of circumstances. Any, Bob.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROBERT E. BEAL: Just a question. Based on this conversation, we'll go back and try to find some options. Is it a better outcome for the Board if we do wait until the recalibrated FES numbers are out and the new data is out in the spring, or if there is an option, I don't know a contractor or something in the interim, should we pursue that?

In other words, what is a better outcome? The concern is if we pursue a contractor of some sort, and I don't know where the funding comes from, and that is completed, and that is before the new data comes out through FES, then are we delayed, pick a number, three years, until our next shot at this? I'm just trying to sort of figure out what road you want staff to go down, to try to make something happen.

I know there are pros and cons both ways, obviously. Waiting until '27, you know a decade out from the last read we had on the stock is a long time. I don't want to push really hard on SEDAR to try to find another assessment person, or something, to get this done early, but then the Board is frustrated, because we don't have the new data in there. Just trying to figure out which one we should chase down as staff.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I think we're all struggling with that, because first of all, we don't know for sure when the FES bias study results and those calibrations are actually going to be delivered, so that is an uncertainty. Then okay, say we found the resources to do something now. Well, we're still going to be plagued with uncertainty, because of the time that has lapsed between the last assessment and the terminal years and all that. I guess the real question is, if you find the resources you do something now, you get results, you get catch level recommendations, and then you may be facing changing them a year later, you know based on updated catch information.

Do you hitch your wagon to the Science Center, hope they do the best they can, and we get it as quick as we can. Then if we have to go back and do something based on new data, then it may fall to us to find the resources to do the update to the assessment, in order to make sure that we have the most current information. I'm kind of thinking maybe that, but I will certainly defer to the Board. Lynn, and then I'll go to Jay.

MS. FEGLEY: Somebody more steeped in assessments, correct me if I'm not thinking about this right. But it seems to me that given the length of time, and this is a benchmark assessment. It seems that the right thing to do is do whatever we can to get the benchmark completed, because if the methodology is approved and the methodology is correct, then once the updated estimates move through, it seems as though an update could occur.

We don't know what the recalibration is going to look like. Maybe it will result in some sort of scaling effect, I don't know. But it seems like a benchmark is a big deal. Maybe the better idea would be to get it going, and then when those new data come in, it might be a simpler matter just to run an update.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Jay, then I'll go to Doug.

DR. McNAMEE: I'm on Team Lynn on this one. I was having the same thought; you know there is an attribute here to kind of creating the assessment. We could be kind of prescriptive there, if we think we could confer with the Science Center. If there is like a type of assessment that they are sort of targeting in their assessment enterprise.

We could say that that is the type of assessment that we want, and there is this attribute of it getting built ahead of time, which the tool would then be available moving forward. Then we can also explicitly ask for explorations, with regard to the recreational data. There is this sentiment that there may be some bias one way or the other.

We put a term of reference in the RFP to say, we want you to look into that, confer with the folks at, I'm blanking on the acronym, but the folks that run MRIP, and kind of get a sense of hey, which way is the bias on a species like this would you think? Then have the person test in that direction, so we get kind of a sense of the effect of that, but also then, whatever the data looks like, it can just get plugged in later. I like the idea of kind of pushing forward if there is a way to do it.

CHAIR WOODWARD: All right, Doug, then I'll go to you, Justin.

MR. DOUG HAYMANS: I guess my question goes back several commenters. Just to clarify, we're not married to the Southeast Regional Center being the lead, right? I mean if there is capacity within a state or the Council or anywhere else, we're not married to the feds, waiting for them to hire somebody before we can restart, right? Is there a reason why it has to be feds?

MR. CAMPFIELD: That has been the pattern historically for cobia and Spanish mackerel, menhaden notably for the Southeast Center, but it is up to you all. It's up to the Board and the Commission to decide if you want to deviate from that. Also, in the context of the number of stock assessments that you all in the states, and our assessment staff already support. That is a heavy workload already, so it has to be really thought through if you want to add another assessment and take it out of the NMFS realm.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Yes, and I'm going to play the devil's advocate here. If we release the Science Center from this partnership, then we might not ever get it back. I think it may be important that we try to hold the line as much as we can, and get them to continue to contribute in support of our activities. But I guess at some point you have to make the hard decision; you know is that limiting to the point that it's putting us in an untenable position? Joe.

MR. CIMINO: I don't think we are at it, but one of the added expenses would be to go to that extent that we have done a few times of actually paying for an independent peer review and paying those folks for their time and all that. It adds up quickly. I guess I'm going to ask Pat. I'm going to ask you a question here.

I see this somewhat as a data poor species, right? I think if we did add fisheries independent data, we probably could have used some of that just as guidance, even without an updated assessment. We don't really have that. You mentioned that things were getting started. Do you have a feel of where this can go? To me, I wasn't even sure we would be passing peer review, so I very, very much appreciate Jay and Lynn's comments.

I mean if we know we're almost at a nonstarter, you know we don't have a great comfort level of what we can do. I think we should be exploring what to do, but to go all the way and pull that trigger, and then say, a year later we get the data that we need. I'm not sure how comfortable I am in that. Did you get far enough as a group to say, what comfort level do you have on an assessment that should be able to pass peer review?

MS. ANGELA GIULIANO: Having been a member of the Stock Assessment Subcommittee, I can say that we had reviewed the available fishery dependent data. One of the big hurdles with this assessment is going to be an Index of Abundance. In the past they had used the Headboat Survey, which even in the last assessment they had to remove the last two years because of the federal fishery closures. The Science Center indicated we shouldn't use that survey going forward. We had been exploring a couple alternatives.

The lead sort of index at that time was probably on MRIP fishery dependent index, if we could somehow figure out some modification to account for technology increase and people through time there has definitely been a growing interest and ability to target these fish. That was about where we were when we got the notice from the Center. I think if we can develop an index, probably a similar model to what was run last time could be accomplished. If not, we would be exploring some more data poor options.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Follow up, Joe?

MR. CIMINO: Yes, thank you, follow up. In that case, if what we're talking about is kind of like an MRIP CPUE or some sort of MRIP based index. I would say I would be happy to wait for the recalibrated MRIP to get a full-on peer review, but use that MRIP Index as guidance in the meantime, and have that presented, maybe even a desktop peer review by some folks like we've done with red drum in the past as some guidance. I hate to put forth all the effort and then a year down the line say, well now we've got the recalibrated MRIP estimates.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Bob, are you clear on that? It sounds like we circled back around to, we're sort of

going to wait and see what happens with the Science Center with their staffing. I mean we are basically at a total standstill until that person comes onboard. Basically, we're at a standstill. It sounds like it's going to be important to know what we're dealing with, in terms of the inputs. I did see another hand. Dan, go ahead.

MR. BEN DYAR: My question may not be able to be answered, but just something to think about. I know that we're talking about conflict of assessments and time limitability to be able to conduct multiple assessments from even the Science Center. Are we confident that that is the only hurdle moving forward to getting it started again is someone getting rehired, or a year later from now are we going to find ourselves potentially having to compete with other assessments that have been started by that time?

MR. CAMPFIELD: Thanks, Ben. In short, our understanding from NMFS and the Southeast Center is cobia remains a top priority. The SEDAR Steering Committee, which sets the schedule there up for the southeast meets every six months. They will meet again late winter. That will be the next opportunity to confirm that, but everything we've heard since the staffing change is that cobia remains a priority.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Okay, I think we've got general agreement that we'll let this play out as it is. Just FYI, this Board will probably not need to meet anytime in the near future. But we can certainly figure out a proper venue to provide updates on this, even if it is not a full Pelagics Board meeting.

Maybe one of our other Policy Board meetings or something, just keep everybody updated on this. Everybody comfortable with that? Okay, very good, we'll move along.

CONSIDER 2025 ATLANTIC COBIA REGIONAL RECREATIONAL MEASURES

CHAIR WOODWARD: Our next item is to Consider the 2025 Atlantic Cobia Regional Recreational Measures, and I'm going to call on Angela to give a TC report.

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT

MS. GIULIANO: The first presentation I have for you today as mentioned is on Potential Recreational Management Measures for the Northern Region, starting in 2025. Going back through time a little bit. At the last Coastal Pelagics Board Meeting Addendum II was approved, and per Addendum II rather than managing the catches at a state-by-state target level, we are now managing the coastwide recreational harvest between two regions.

A northern region that includes Virginia north, which is allocated 68.7 percent of our coastwide recreational quota, and the southern region, which is allocated 31.3 percent. Again, these new allocation harvest targets are under the current coastwide quota of 76,908 fish on the recreational side. An additional change with Addendum II was that we can now evaluate harvest against the harvest targets for up to five years of data. However, given the current regulatory changes that occurred in 2021, for this we evaluated each region's average harvest across 2021 to 2023 against this target to see if reductions were necessary in 2025.

This table shows first the recreational harvest targets with the new allocation scheme for the northern and southern region, starting with the northern region. The new harvest target is 52,825 fish, based on the 2021 through 2023 average recreational harvest we are about 10,000 fish over the target, which means that the northern region would be required to take a 15.9 percent reduction to bring us back to the recreational harvest target level.

The southern region the recreational harvest target is now 24,083 fish, and the average recreational harvest over that 3-year time period was 23,474 fish. Given that is under target, the southern region can maintain status quo management measures, either until a management change is required with a reduction or the completion of the CR95 stock assessment.

In Addendum II, it specifies that in order for us to implement this 15.9 percent reduction, we currently within the region have to get all of the states onto the same size and vessel limit. However, seasons are allowed to vary across the coast, due to the migratory nature of cobia through the summertime.

The FMP also specifies that the minimum size limit cannot be below 40 inches total length, or 36 inches fork length. If we look at our current regulations, Delaware, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island are currently under the de minimis regulations that were allowed in the previous amendment or addendum, so they all have a 37-inch total length size limit with a 1-fish vessel limit and are opened all year long.

As an alternative de minimis measure, Maryland and PRFC have matched Virginia's regulations, which is a 40-inch total length minimum size limit with a 2-fish vessel limit, and a season that is open from June 15 to September 15. It should be noted here that Virginia's regulations also are currently a little bit more conservative, with only allowing 1 of those 2 fish per vessel to be over 50 inches.

However, that regulation is not one that was carried over to Maryland for the Potomac River. The first step in all of this is basically for the Technical Committee to develop methods to address changing either size limits, the vessel limit, or the season lengths to achieve that reduction, or some combination of those options.

As was used for other species as well as cobia in the past, there is an inclusion we use to combine these different reduction methods, in order to estimate what the cumulative reduction would be, and this is basically done so that we're not double counting fish, we're not saving a fish with a size limit change as well as the vessel limit change, but only counting that fish once.

For all of these analyses, the MRIP data was pooled for 2021, 2022 and 2023, again, because that is the time period when regulations have been consistent since the last changes. As I mentioned earlier, the first thing with Addendum II is that all states are required to have at least a 40-inch total length minimum size limit. That would require that Delaware through Rhode Island increase their minimum size from 37 inches total length to at least 40. The Technical Committee considered ways to try giving credit for this increase in size limit.

But there just really wasn't enough data. There were only a handful of fish lengths collected by MRIP for Delaware through Rhode Island in those three years, and at least on the initial look at it, all of the fish were over 40 inches already. There is no credit given for that as far as we were able to quantify.

The second part of this then was using the MRIP length frequencies for all states in the region, or in this case Virginia through Rhode Island to explore the various size limit options. We're assuming all states start at the minimum 40-inch size limit. We did end up including both imputed and non-imputed lengths in this analysis, due to sample size issues again, and a much higher sample size with using some of those imputed lengths.

These analyses do account for a 5 percent release mortality for any new discards that occur as the result of the right change. If the region decides to implement a 1-fish vessel limit, this ended up calculating what that reduction would be using the Maryland and Virginia data. It should be noted here the Potomac River, for those that aren't familiar with it, the landings estimated from that jurisdiction end up either in Maryland's estimate or Virginia's

estimate, depending on whichever side of the river someone lands on and they are intercepted.

Those are covered with just the Maryland and Virginia MRIP data. But basically, we compiled the MRIP trip intercept data to determine the number of fish harvested per vessel trip, and the number of anglers. When we did this, we assumed that any trip that had previously harvested two fish, that trip would still occur, but they would just now harvest the single fish and release the other one.

If the Board decides that they would rather keep the 2-fish vessel limit for Maryland, Virginia and PRFC, that means that the states from Delaware through Rhode Island would increase their vessel limit from 1 fish to 2 fish. Again, there really wasn't sufficient MRIP data to calculate what that increase could be.

We've initially tried using methods used by North Carolina in the past that had intercepts where a fish was harvested, as well as released, and we could now move one of the released fish over as a harvested fish, but in this case all of the intercepts if they harvested a fish, they didn't release any cobia.

Instead, what we're presenting to the Board is a range of options, assuming either a lower bound where there is no change in the Delaware through Rhode Island harvest estimate with this vessel limit change, as well as a kind of upper bound where we basically just doubled the harvest that we have observed in the past.

Then the average between those two would be an increase of 1.3 percent. All the tables you'll see later do use this 2.5 upper bound scenario, and that is really because it's kind of a, I don't want to say worst case scenario, but it's the higher end of what we would expect. There were really very few differences between using the upper bound or average when calculating options. The few that occurred are noted on the tables when we get there. Lastly, for the season methods, we calculated season reductions only for the Maryland/Virginia/PRFC part of the region. Again, we don't have sufficient MRIP data for states Delaware north. If any seasons are implemented in those states, they are not credited for the reduction. But again, the Addendum does say that seasons may differ between states and regions. Any reduction you see is just per season change would be Maryland and Virginia only.

Similar to past changes in calculations, for the Maryland through Virginia season reductions we calculated that over the three years by individual harvest date through the Wave, this is a little bit different than what we do for other species, just because of the short seasons and pulse nature of these fisheries. There could be differences in catch rates, either early in the season or towards the end of the season.

It often only occurs for part of a Wave when seasons may be open or fish are available. That's what was done for the reductions. As mentioned earlier when we looked at the vessel limit change of potentially Maryland through Virginia going to a 1-fish vessel limit, it overshot that 15.9 percent reduction.

We did look into the possibility of increasing the season length to compensate for that. In this case, we just calculated a daily catch rate based off the number of days the season was open over that timeframe. This does however, mean that there is uncertainty due to those varying daily catch rates.

You know, if you're only adding a few days there are going to be differences between weekend, week days, that sort of thing, and this daily rate kind of average was over all of that uncertainty. Before I present options, the TC does emphasize the sources of uncertainty and management considerations that the Board should be thinking about as you contemplate which management options to implement.

The first of that being analysis assumes that fish availability besides length frequencies, and the

angler effort are the same in future years as what we observed in 2021 through 2023. If any of that changes we could see different results in the future. Additionally, if cobia's range continues to expand, more fish could become available to those northern states and harvest an increase despite management measures to reduce the harvest.

The TC also discussed certain states seeing larger fish in general, particularly at the northern part of the range. If some states do primarily see a larger fish, any sort of maximum slot limit could limit the available fish for harvest. As I just mentioned, the season expansion analysis assumes a constant daily harvest, due to the lack of recent data outside the current season, so that adds a little bit of uncertainty when you're looking to expand the season.

The TC also had a long discussion about how difficult large cobia are to measure on the vessel, so it's possible that if you're having to get a fish on the boat to check the maximum size limit or a much higher minimum size limit, there could be injury to the fish, as well as resulting increasing dead discards. We also used the 5 percent discard mortality rate from the previous assessment, which I do not believe invoked gaffing. The effect of gaffing may not be fully captured in our assumed release mortality rate.

Though it should be noted that at least in the northern region, where Virginia makes up the bulk of the harvest, Virginia has had a ban on gaffing for cobia since 2021. The last thing the TC wanted to note was regarding Virginia's current size limit, which only allows for 1 fish if the 2-per vessel be over 50 inches.

As I mentioned, Virginia is the only state that has this rule, and all of the length frequencies we used for the analysis include this caveat with the Virginia data. Unsurprisingly, most of the data is coming out of Virginia, since that is where most of the harvest is. It is unclear if the Board would want to implement these criteria for all states in the region.

If the provision is implemented for the entire region, there is the potential for anglers to start high grading. If the provision is removed in favor of a slot limit, with the 2 fish vessel limit, you know something like the 2 fish harvested up to 53 inches, you have 2 large fish. There potentially could be more harvest of those larger fish.

However, it should be noted that in the years we looked at for '21 through '23, only about a third of the Maryland and Virginia trips were limiting out at the vessel level. Overall, it's difficult to quantify what the impact of this regulation would be on the rest of the coast. Moving into the tables next after this slide, all of these management options are estimated to achieve at least the 50.9 percent reduction in the northern region. Each option has three components, the size limit, the vessel limit and the season for Maryland, PRFC and Virginia only.

It should be noted this isn't an exhaustive list, it was kind of a summary list of what options we thought were viable, but the Technical Committee can provide other combinations of size limits and seasons, if there is something particular the Board is interested in. Splitting up across two slides, this first slide, the first option basically is the one that reduces the vessel limit to 1 fish, and allows for a slightly expanded fishing season of about one week. It maintains the 40-inch minimum size limit.

The second option keeps that 40-inch minimum size, as well as the 2 fish vessel limit that is currently in place for Maryland through Virginia, but reduces the season length, either on the front end or the back end of the 16.7, because if you reduce the back end to August 25 versus reducing a season in the beginning of the year at June 30, that is the 24.4 percent reduction.

Options 3 through 4 on this slide increase the minimum size, as well as reduce the season length. Then Option 5 raises the minimum size but maintains the current Maryland through Virginia

seasons and the current 2-fish vessel limit at 43 inches. On this last slide it gets into all of the various slot options that the TC considered.

These top four options again, all have the 2-fish vessel limit and maintain that 40-inch minimum size limit. The first one is a slot limit needed to maintain the current season dates, and then the second through fourth options differ by adjusting the upper size limit as well as the seasons. Then these last two options on here also increase the minimum size limit, as well as put that maximum size limit on, but are able to maintain the June 15 through September 15 season for Maryland through Virginia. Those are the asks of the Technical Committee prepared for your consideration today, and at this point I can take any questions on the methods, though I will say, Emilie will be presenting timeline, so anything related to that will come up next.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Thank you, Angela. Questions for Angela on the TCs evaluation. Jay.

DR. McNAMEE: Thanks, Angela, great presentation. As I was reading the memo and as you're going through that, I'm like having flashbacks to the Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass, it's that kind of trying to cobble together from scraps of data that you have, and you guys did a nice job with it, so good job.

I think what I was wondering is, if you explored, so I'll go back to scup, black sea bass and during the most recent, I don't know year, year and a half, some modeling approaches to doing this stuff have been investigated, so there is like a super fancy, the RDM model that they run out of the Science Center.

Then there was a simpler approach that was proposed at the same time that just used gam models. I wondered if you guys had explored, there may not be enough data for the like the fancy model, I think there is an updater to run the gams, your modeling approach. Just to offer why and suggesting this, you know when you piece these things together, they actually interact.

You know if you change the bag and change the season there is like an interaction between those two things, which when you're dealing them separately it's not accounted for. Maybe you did account for it. We used to have this little equation that we would kind of use, but I think a better way to do it is through a modeling approach that is integrating everything, so yes, thanks.

MS. GIULIANO: Yes, so currently the way we are accounting for it is the little equation, which essentially is looking at the overlap between these percentages during that overlap. We have not explored a modeling approach, I know I've heard that discussed for other species, but that has not come up on the Cobia TC at this point. It could be something to look into.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Any other questions for Angela before I go to Emilie for the timeline. Seeing none; Emilie, turn it over to you.

CONSIDER OPTIONS FOR NORTHERN REGION RECREATIONAL MEASURES AND TIMELINE FOR SELECTING AND IMPLEMENTING FINAL MEASURES

MS. FRANKE: I will just go over the potential timelines. We had some questions from board members on how this process would work and what the timeline would be, so staff put together a couple of possible timelines for your consideration, but also this is a Board decision, so if the Board has other timelines in mind, you know it is up to the Board.

Again, this is a Board decision for these northern region measures on when to actually select the measures and what date in 2025 to implement those measures. Just also a note, the Board can specify that these northern region measures would be in place for '25 and '26, to align with our current coastwide recreational quota, which is in place through 2026. This first possible timeline would be for the Board to actually select the northern region measures today, and in that case the states in the

northern region would submit implementation plans by a specified date, and the Board could review those implementation plans via e-mail vote. The next possible timeline, Timeline 2 would be that the Board approve the TC methodology today.

Then the states in the northern region could take some time after the meeting today to coordinate and consider the options, and then if all the states in the northern region can come to a consensus on which measures to implement, the states could submit implementation plans by a specified date for the Board to consider via e-mail vote.

This would be if the Full Board was comfortable with this approach of letting the northern states come to that agreement outside of a Board meeting, based on the suite of options from the TC, and then providing their final implementation plans to the Full Board. Then the third possible timeline is similar.

States could take some time after this meeting to consider the options, however, if the states in the northern region cannot come to consensus, then we would need to schedule a full board meeting via webinar to vote on which measures to implement for the northern region. Again, if the Board has other timelines in mind, that would be a Board decision, so happy to take any questions.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Questions for Emilie? With no questions then, Doug.

MR. HAYMANS: I know that we've talked about this at previous meetings, but I want to make sure I understand. Is conservation equivalency for those states still in play after they agree on a common set, or is conservation equivalency off the table?

MS. FRANKE: Conservation equivalency is off the table. Yes, as discussed for Addendum II, you know the objective of this regional management is to have the consistent vessel and size limit, so states cannot deviate from whichever set of options is selected. But the seasons can vary, of course, but they can't deviate from the vessel or size limits.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Follow up, Doug.

MR. HAYMANS: Okay, I thought that was it, but I wanted to make sure. But go back to that last slide you had up. I want to make sure I understand what that slide is saying. It's saying that if the northern portion of this can agree then they make their own decision. But if they can't, then it comes to the Full Board and this end of the table gets involved at that point, right?

MS. FRANKE: Right, at that point it would be a Full Board vote if the states cannot come to consensus.

MR. HAYMANS: All right, I just want to keep that in mind.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Jay.

DR. McNAMEE: Just to make sure I'm understanding the difference between 2 and 3 is just that 3 is explicit about what happens if there is like lack of agreement amongst the northern states. It kind of defines what would happen after that, but Timeline 3 is also inclusive of Timeline 2, like if we do come to a consensus than that is fine.

MS. FRANKE: Right, so maybe the labeling of 2 and 3 as separate options is confusing, but they are essentially the same option, where the states have time after this meeting to consider measures, and if the states can come to consensus, then the states can just submit their implementation plans to the Board via e-mail. But if the states can't come to consensus, then we need to have another Board meeting to vote on those measures.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Lynn, are you sure? Come on. Okay, go ahead, Mr. Clark.

MR. JOHN CLARK: I just wanted to clarify. When you said can have different seasons that includes no season, right? It can just be open continuously, but

we will have to change the size limit, even though it can't be measured what difference we're having as de minimis states.

MS. FRANKE: Correct, so a state can have, I'm sorry, any state besides Maryland and Virginia can have a year-round season or any season, because we can't quantify that, and correct, we can't quantify that jump for Rhode Island through Delaware for that 37 to 40.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Having a little buyer's remorse there, John?

MR. CLARK: Just being a crotchety old bureaucrat, hating to have to change a regulation yet again for a species no one is catching.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I understand. The Board does have to give some guidance here. If you've got an alternative outside of these three, describe it. If one of these seems to be a best choice. Mr. Geer.

MR. PATRICK GEER: Mr. Chairman, I'm ready to make a motion.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Good.

MR. GEER: I think the staff have it at this point.

CHAIR WOODWARD: If it could be displayed and read it into the record, and we'll hopefully get a second.

MR. GEER: Okay, I'm going to have to modify a couple places on there, but **move to approve the Cobia Technical Committee methodology for developing recreational management options to meet the northern region reduction. That is Timeline Option 2. States in the northern region will select a set of measures for 2025-2026 and submit implementation plans for Board consideration by January 1, 2025. States in the northern region must implement the new measures by April, 1, 2025. If the states in the northern region cannot come to a consensus on which measures to implement, a virtual Board meeting will be scheduled to select measures.** If I get a second.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I have a second, Joe Cimino second. Just a question before we get into discussion. It didn't really come up before, but if it required a virtual Board meeting, do we want to put in there a time certain for implementation of the measures, regardless of whether it's a consensus or a Board deliberation, or do we leave that open ended?

MR. GEER: I have confidence in my fellow Commissioners that we are going to reach consensus on this.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I appreciate confidence, it's a good thing. Discussion on the motion. Jay.

DR. McNAMEE: Yes, so this motion, I think we're kind of looking at the suite of options. I'll back up. The timelines seem to imply something. Implied that we were kind of locked into the options that the Technical Committee put together. Does that preclude somebody like coming forward with some other type of analysis to kind of look at that? I'm fine if it does, I just want to be sure and not do some work if it's going to get ignored.

MS. FRANKE: Yes, so this would approve the TC methodology that Angela just presented, so any different methodology would not be considered at this point.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Further discussion or questions for clarification. Joe.

MR. CIMINO: I'm supportive of the timeline, because I think there are some big changes coming for the northern states. I think the sooner that we can put forth what options or what regulations will be coming, I think is very important. I think Spud, to your question. If it even came to a virtual Board meeting, I would still hope for an April 1 implementation date.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I just want to make sure that is understood, because it is not specifically stated in there. Any further discussion? Do we need to caucus on this before a vote? Any need for caucusing? Don't' see any heads nodding yes, so we're going to assume no, so I'm going to call the question. Any opposition to this motion? We'll try it that way first.

All right, seeing none, is there any **abstentions? We have South Carolina, Georgia and Florida abstaining**. Any null votes? Okay, **motion carries**, all right, thank you, Pat, for that. Appreciate that. Anything further on that, Emilie? Okay, I guess a question. Whose house are you all meeting at to sort this out?

MR. GEER: Good point. We'll organize the meeting. We'll set up that meeting with everybody.

ATLANTIC COBIA
TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT

CHAIR WOODWARD: Okay, all right, very good. We'll move along on our agenda here, and go back to Angela. You know one of the things in the recently approved Addendum was consideration of a confidence interval approach to looking at the variability in the MRIP estimates, and so we've got a Technical Committee Report on that.

ADDENDUM II CONFIDENCE INTERVAL APPROACH

MS. GIULIANO: Moving into this agenda item. At the last Board meeting the Technical Committee was tasked to discuss this confidence interval approach, and its potential application to the new regional allocation that were approved at the last Board meeting. As part of this task, we are also tasked with a discussion of other confidence interval levels, in addition to the 95 percent confidence interval that was referenced in Addendum II. Again, a refresher, though we covered part of this with the last presentation.

Currently, we use a rolling average approach. Each region's average recreational landings are evaluated against the regional target. Previously this was a 3-year timeline, but under Addendum II now we're averaging up to 5 years of data that has been under the same management measures. If a region's average landings exceed the target, the region must adjust measures to reduce harvest to the target level.

If a region's annual harvest is below the target for at least two consecutive years, that region may liberalize, as long as they are not estimated to exceed the target. In Addendum II, there is a provision that the Board can vote to switch from the current rolling average approach to this confidence interval approach for harvest target evaluation.

The intention here was basically to more directly account for the uncertainty around the MRIP point estimates using the confidence intervals. Instead of comparing the rolling average harvest against the target, it compares at 95 percent confidence intervals through the harvest target each year. Again, similar to the current rolling average approach.

The evaluation period would include up to five years, assuming the same management measures were in place. In this provision, it says that if the entire confidence interval is above the harvest target for a majority of the years, the harvest is estimated to have been above the target, and the region must take a reduction.

Alternatively, if the entire confidence interval is below the target for a majority of years, the harvest has been estimated to have been below the target and the region could liberalize. However, if the harvest target falls within the confidence interval for the majority of the years, the region maintains status quo measures.

Then ultimately however, if the confidence interval evaluation indicates that action is needed, the average landings are still used to calculate that percent reduction needed, reduction or

liberalization relative to the target. I know on the PDT there was some discussion about what the majority of years means.

In this case if we had five years it could be three out of five years or two out of three years would count as a majority, if it's split evenly, such as two out of four years or one out of two years, then the Technical Committee would recommend management action. This confidence interval provision also tried to align with the MRIP recommendation, so years of PSEs greater than 50, with those estimates having high PSE values would be excluded from the evaluation.

Years with PSEs between 30 to 50, which MRIP recommends using caution, would be reviewed by the TC, to determine whether to include them in the evaluation. The Technical Committee applied the confidence interval approach to the current 2021 through 2023 evaluation period, as well as the previous 2017 through 2019 period, which is the last time we evaluated measures. It should be noted that earlier time period in 2017 through 2019, the evaluation was still state by state, so the Technical Committee assumed the regional framework was in place for the exercise. Just to give you a range of what the options might look like.

In addition to the 95 percent confidence interval, we also examined the 90 percent, 85 percent, 80 percent and a 50 percent confidence interval, just to explore a large range for you guys. While the Technical Committee doesn't have any final recommendations at this point, we do have some observations and initial input for the Board. Just as an example of what we're looking at here when we're discussing confidence intervals.

The example here is for the 2022 Virginia through Maine estimate of cobia harvest, with a PSE of 23.7. You can see here the point estimate is a harvest value of 43,841 fish. Essentially what the confidence interval is telling us is that we are 95 percent sure that the actual harvest value is somewhere within that range.

In other words, if the surveys were conducted repeatedly, over and over again, the resulting confidence intervals would include the true population value 95 percent of the time. In this case for 95 percent confidence interval, we expect that the harvest estimate is lying somewhere between 23,495 fish up to 64,187 fish.

You'll see with the 80 percent confidence interval, you still have that same point estimate of 43,841 fish, but now that confidence range is smaller. The 80 percent confidence interval only goes from 30,533 fish up to 57,149 fish. You see that throughout the presentation when we look at some of the graphs on the next slide, but as we have smaller confidence intervals those error bars are getting smaller on the estimates.

Looking at the northern regions, again these two orangish/red colored lines on here are the three-year evaluation periods for 2017 through '19, and 2021 through 2023. In the past, as what we are currently doing, I shouldn't say in the past. Using the current methods, using a rolling average approach, both of these time periods were shown to be above the harvest target and reductions were taken or will be taken.

In both periods the 95 percent confidence intervals are the broadest, and showed that status quo measures could be anything. You'll see that across those lines those confidence intervals, the majority of the years are crossing the error bars. The smaller confidence intervals used during the 2017 through 2019 period, however, will see a particularly low confidence the 85 percent one, show that reductions were being good.

Then in the more recent time period, given the uncertainty with the data, status quo measures should be maintained across all of the various confidence interval options that we looked at. For the southern model, the current approach would have allowed for liberalization in the 2017 through

2019 period, and status quo for the 2021 through '23 period. As with the northern analysis, the 95 percent confidence interval was the most likely to result in a status quo recommendation, while liberalization was far more likely to be supported when using smaller confidence intervals in the 2017 through 2019 period. Some initial Technical Committee observations, as I just said, the 95 percent confidence intervals are fairly large considering the uncertainties in the cobia data being used. Using those 95 percent confidence intervals would most likely result in less frequent management changes, and more status quo determinations.

While the current rolling average approach doesn't account for the data uncertainties directly, it does allow for quicker response to changes in harvest through time. As I mentioned before, many of these confidence interval approaches that we evaluated outside of those 95 percent confidence intervals, resulted in similar management advice on whether to reduce or liberalize, compared to our current methods.

The one real big difference here would be the northern region for 2021 through 2023, where basically any of the confidence interval approaches would suggest that we should stay status quo rather than taking a reduction, as we currently are doing with the rolling average approach. We didn't see a similar determination until it got down to a 50 percent confidence interval.

As I mentioned before, the Technical Committee doesn't have a final recommendation on this approach at this time, but had some initial observations and input for the Board. The first was to consider how the Board's management goals for the harvest evaluations, well consider what your management goals are, and how the harvest evaluation should factor into that, as well as how responsive you would like to be.

Some of this I think, you know the Technical Committee felt could be dependent on other factors. We were just talking about the frequency of stock assessments and what's going on with the current stock assessment. In a case where the average harvest exceeds the target for a number of years, and the time between assessments is long, the Board may want to be more responsive, given the infrequent updates on stock status.

Also, just to note that this confidence interval approach would still require a number of Technical Committee decisions. Even though we have now reduced our PSEs by aggregating the MRIP data to regions, there are still a number of years that have PSEs between 30 and 50. It would be up to the Technical Committee to decide whether to include that year in the evaluation.

This is just a table showing what the regional PSEs look like for the northern and southern region, and all the yellow ones highlighted there are ones between 30 and 50. The Technical Committee would like some more time to consider this approach. Also, to get some feedback from the Board on how the rolling average and confidence interval approaches would align with their management goals for the stock. With that I can take any questions.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Questions for Angela? I don't see any. Jay.

DR. McNAMEE: Yes, I hesitated raising my hand, because I'm not sure that this is an actual question. But I'll go for it anyways. Thank you for this work, it was really informative. I always find that interesting, so we have this approach, averaging approach that is meant to account, sort of like a hat to account for the uncertainty, but kind of on its face at the hat. Let's get refined, let's look at the confidence intervals and see how that performs, and lo and behold they kind of both work the same, you know depending on which level you take. I always kind of get a kick out of that anyways. But thank you for the work, it's good work. I agree with some of the recommendations. First, that when you do something like this you kind of have some

information, but you don't know what you're shooting for, so it's just kind of information that is hanging out there.

I think one, it's kind of like an implied metric is a notion of stability, like how many times would we have had to change. That is kind of how I viewed the information, and it looks like it's pretty much, you have to really kind of collapse in on the distribution to get it to actually react, because the confidence intervals are so large to begin with. That is useful information, and that recommendation I think is a good one from the Technical Committee as well that it depends on.

You know if you want it to be more responsive than you pick the 50 percent or somewhere between there and 80, or something like that. I guess I'm struggling. I think we should keep pursuing this. I like the approach. I'm struggling a little bit to understand how we hone in on getting the Technical Committee information that they need to be able to provide us with judgments about these different things.

You know I think it could take a bunch of different forms, like a survey of the Board, but I don't know. I think to pursue this further they need a little more guidance from the Board as to what we're looking for. Stability could be one feature, and then they would be able to tell us, okay this one provides the most stability at a 95 percent confidence interval you never change.

But that might conflict with, we also don't want to overfish, and you kind of end up doing sort of like a mini management strategy evaluation, basically is what you're doing. I know that people don't like that word, so I hesitated to use it. But we don't have to do a really complicated one, but I think to pursue this further we need to provide more guidance. I'll kind of let that float out there, and if I have any more definitive thoughts, I'll offer them, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Any other questions, comments in response to this? Go ahead, Jesse.

MR. JESSE HORNSTEIN: I have a question. After we change measures for '25, we'll just have one year data to work with the following year, so whether we use the confidence interval approach or the average approach, both kind of assume that there is some length of time to look at an average or the majority of years.

When we come back next year to look at the harvest compared to the target, in the Addendum it says you can always be required to adjust measures if you are above the target. When you only have one year of data, are we still required to do that, or assuming g say it's above the target, or is that just kind of Board discretion at that time?

MS. FRANKE: Yes, thanks for that question. Just to expand on this scenario. The current specifications end in 2026, so the Board will have to consider setting specifications and recreational measures starting in '27. We'll be doing that at the end of '26, so we'll be looking back at data from 2025 prior. Since we were doing a management change in '25, we'll only have that one year of data. I think that is a question for the Board to ponder, because I'm not sure when the original FMP was developed. There was much thought about the scenario of, what if we only have one year of data, whether we're using the average approach or the confidence interval approach. I think that's a helpful thing to point out at this point, that once we get to 2026 and the Board is thinking about 2027, we're going to be in a little bit of a conundrum, because we'll only have one year of data, based on this next management change. I think that will take some future discussion of the Board to think about how we move forward for 2027.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Lynn, see if you can figure that out, go ahead and get ready. It's going to fall squarely in your lap, I'm afraid, as Chair. Yes, I'm glad you brought that up. It is something we need to be thinking about, so Jay.

DR. McNAMEE: Emilie, can I ask you a little more about that. In that case, is the idea that the averaging approach wouldn't work but the confidence interval approach could work, because you have that in the single year, correct?

MS. FRANKE: I think theoretically, yes. But again, I think this is a scenario that maybe the original FMP didn't have the confidence interval approach, so I think just in general the scenario of only having one year of data wasn't really considered. I think it would be up to the Board to think about, you know would using the confidence interval approach for just one year, I think that could functionally work, but would the Board be comfortable with that? I think we're going to have to have some more discussion on it to see.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I think you run the possibility of the half PSEs to qualifying so much data that you don't even have anything to work with. Lynn.

MS. FEGLEY: Thanks, I appreciate the punt over there. We just had a conversation about the stock assessment, and its delay. I think somebody said, and maybe it was Joe said that the delay of the stock assessment might put us into status quo, maybe for longer than we might want to be. Maybe a lot of this comes back around to when that assessment becomes available, because if we reach '26 and we're trying to set the specifications and maybe what these force us into, we don't have any stock assessment.

We don't know what would drive those new specifications. It's just going to run us into extending our status quo measures for a little bit longer, until we can implement either a PSE technique that works, or a rolling average technique, and also work on getting those assessments. I don't know if I'm making sense, but it seems like there is some interplay here that at the end of the day we may find ourselves just in protracted status quo, while we get our ducks in a row with the assessment and the confidence intervals or PSE approach, or rolling average approach, sorry.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I think that is an accurate characterization of the future is that we've got a lot of balls in the air that all need to come to hand before we truly make the kind of informed decision that we need to make. Lynn.

MS. FEGLEY: I guess my follow up to that, sort of the conclusion I never reached was, maybe when we have more information on when the assessment is coming through, maybe that is the time when the Board could make a decision how it wants to go forward, and potentially, so if we understand that the assessment is going to be delayed until 2028, the Board can take action to extend our specifications until that time. That was kind of a conclusion I was aiming for, but never got to.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Right, we're certainly not at a decision point now, you know. We've got things that have to play out before we know enough to make an informed decision. Again, thanks, Angela, for that. I do think we continue to need to be thinking about, you know if we're going to use this confidence interval approach, where do we want those boundaries to be set, you know in terms of our comfort?

Because it all comes back to the old perennial balance of risk versus uncertainty, like it always seems to do. Cobia is certainly a poster child for the challenges of that, you know pulse fishery, catch estimates with high uncertainty. Any further discussion on that topic? If not, we'll move along.

UPDATE FROM SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL ON MACKEREL PORT MEETINGS

CHAIR WOODWARD: I'm going to call on John Carmichael for an update on our Atlantic Coast Mackerel Port Meetings.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We continue with the Port Meetings; we've held them recently in Florida. We

had them in South Carolina as well, which were rescheduled. A pretty good turnout in the more southern ones in Florida. I think North Carolina is probably still leading, in terms of the number of fishermen who showed up.

The last round is coming up in the Mid-Atlantic, which will be November 18th in Virginia Beach. The 19th in White Stone, the 20th in Ocean City, and 21st in Manahawkin. We really appreciate the efforts everybody has put into through this, as we work through these Port Meetings to help spread the word, encouraging fishermen to get there and get this input.

Its' been really great input through the process that's for sure. There is a lot of interest by those fishermen, they are very engaged. The next steps are we're planning to review the report from all the meetings at the March, 2025 Council meeting. Then at that point the intent is to begin an amendment, which would look at the fishery really comprehensively. Looking at the goals and objectives of the amendment, and looking at catch limits for Spanish mackerel, the other management changes that might be needed.

I'm expecting there will be a Mackerel Cobia AP meeting in the spring to review the report, and at some point, we may want to consider if there is value in getting the Council's advisors and the ASMFC advisors together, and somehow to provide input on this and go through the amendment. That is something we can certainly work out at the staff level. Information on all these is on the Council website, for those that are interested in following along, and hopefully ascending, so I know we're working on getting folks there.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Thanks, John, any questions for John on that? Emilie.

MS. FRANKE: Yes, just for states in the Mid-Atlantic. I'll be reaching out next week, the Council staff passed along some outreach materials that I will share with you.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Once the Council initiates action on this Addendum, then we'll have to start contemplating what our response is going to be to synchronize our activities. Just as a reminder, we've got a stock status determination and some catch level advice that is going to require some potentially unpleasant changes, so that is something we're going to be facing in the not-too-distant future.

ADJOURNMENT

Thank you, John, and thanks to everybody at the states, and at the Commission and the Council that have put these meetings together. I attended one in Coastal Georgia, and it was an interesting opportunity to get people to just talk about their perspective on things. There were some common themes that emerged out of it that I think are pretty illuminating, in terms of how people perceive the abundance of fish and changes in the ecosystem. At this point, is there any Other Business to come before the Pelagics Board? Seeing none; we'll adjourn.

(Whereupon the meeting adjourned at 1:50 p.m. on October 22, 2024)

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

TO: **Coastal Pelagics Management Board**

FROM: **Cobia Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Subcommittee**

DATE: **January 16, 2026**

SUBJECT: **Review the Terms of Reference for the 2027 Stock Assessment for Atlantic Cobia**

The Cobia Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Subcommittee (TC-SAS) recommend the Board consider the enclosed Terms of Reference for the 2027 Stock Assessment for Atlantic Cobia.

This stock assessment for Atlantic cobia is re-starting after initial stock assessment work in 2024 through the SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process was paused due to changing availability of the lead analyst. A new lead analyst from NOAA Fisheries was identified to begin work on the assessment in early 2026, and it was decided the Commission will lead the assessment process (Data, Methods, and Assessment Workshops) and SEDAR will coordinate a Peer Review Workshop (SEDAR 107).

The Board approved the SAS membership via email vote in December 2025, and the TC-SAS met to discuss the enclosed Terms of Reference for Board consideration. The assessment will be conducted throughout 2026 and into 2027 with a peer review workshop to be scheduled by SEDAR.

Enclosed: Draft Terms of Reference for the 2027 Stock Assessment for Atlantic Cobia for Board Approval

TERMS OF REFERENCE

For the 2027 ASMFC Atlantic Cobia Stock Assessment

Draft for Board Approval

Terms of Reference for the Cobia Assessment

1. Identify relevant ecosystem influences on the stock, including impacts to range shifts and/or expansions. Consider findings, as appropriate, in addressing other TORs. Report how the findings were considered under impacted TORs.

2. Investigate all available life history data, including but not limited to age, growth and reproductive characteristics, stock structure, and natural mortality. Describe the spatial and temporal distribution of the data. Characterize the uncertainty and error in the data. Discuss strengths and weaknesses of the data sources and justify inclusion or elimination of datasets.

3. Investigate available fishery-independent and -dependent data sets. Characterize precision, accuracy, and uncertainty in available abundance indices, as well as commercial and recreational landings and discards. Include estimation of length and age distribution of landings and discards and discard mortality, as feasible. Characterize the uncertainty in the data and spatial distribution of the fisheries. Review new MRIP estimates of catch and effort for use in the assessment, if available. Discuss strengths and weaknesses of the data sources and justify inclusion or elimination of datasets.

4. Develop model(s) used to estimate population parameters (e.g., F, abundance) and reference points and analyze model performance. Provide comparisons between the current assessment and the prior benchmark assessment (SEDAR 58), where feasible. Provide model diagnostics, sensitivity analyses, retrospective analysis of the model results, and historical retrospective.

5. Update or redefine biological reference points (BRPs; for example, point estimates or proxies for BMSY, SSBMSY, *FMSY,* MSY). Define stock status based on BRPs where possible. Compare reference points derived in this assessment with what is known about the general life history of the exploited stock. Explain any inconsistencies. Compare and contrast BRPs and time series estimates in this assessment with values from previous benchmark (SEDAR 58) assessment, as feasible, and comment on the impacts of changes in data, assumptions, or assessment methods on estimated population conditions.

6. If a minority report has been filed, explain majority reasoning against adopting approach suggested in that report. The minority report should explain reasoning against adopting approach suggested by the majority.

7. Develop detailed short and long-term prioritized lists of recommendations for future research, data collection, and assessment methodology.

8. Recommend timing of next benchmark assessment and intermediate updates, if necessary, relative to biology and current management of Cobia.

Terms of Reference for the Cobia Peer Review

1. Evaluate the summary and analyses, if available, that were completed to explore the impact of environmental conditions on the stock, including range shifts and/or expansions.

2. Evaluate life history analyses and the age, growth, reproduction, and natural mortality information used in the assessment. Evaluate the stock structure and geographic scale at which the population was assessed. Evaluate the justification for inclusion or elimination of available data sources.

3. Evaluate the thoroughness of data collection and the presentation and treatment of fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data in the assessment, including the following but not limited to:
    a. Presentation of data source variance (e.g., standard errors).
    b. Justification for inclusion or elimination of available data sources.
    c. Consideration of data strengths and weaknesses (e.g., temporal and spatial scale, gear selectivities, aging accuracy, sample size).
    d. Calculation and/or standardization of abundance indices.

4. Evaluate the methods and model(s) used to estimate population parameters (e.g., F, abundance) and reference points, including but not limited to:
    a. Evaluate the choice and justification of the preferred model(s). Was the most appropriate model (or model averaging approach) chosen given available data and life history of Cobia?
    b. Evaluate model parameterization and specification (e.g., choice of CVs, effective sample sizes, likelihood weighting schemes, calculation/specification of M, stock-recruitment relationship, choice of time-varying parameters, plus group treatment).
    c. Evaluate the diagnostic analyses performed, including but not limited to:
        - Sensitivity analyses to determine model stability and potential consequences of major model assumptions.

- Retrospective analysis.

d. Evaluate the methods used to characterize uncertainty in estimated parameters. Ensure the implications of uncertainty in technical conclusions are clearly stated.

5. Recommend best estimates of stock biomass, abundance, and exploitation from the assessment for use in management, if possible, or specify alternative estimation methods. Evaluate the choice of reference points and the methods used to estimate them. Recommend stock status determination from the assessment, or, if appropriate, specify alternative methods/measures.

6. If a minority report has been filed, review minority opinion and any associated analyses. If possible, make recommendation on current or future use of alternative assessment approach presented in minority report.

7. Review the research, data collection, and assessment methodology recommendations provided by the TC and make any additional recommendations warranted. Clearly prioritize the activities needed to inform and maintain the current assessment and provide recommendations to improve the reliability of future assessments.

8. Review the recommended timeframe for future assessments provided by the TC and recommend any necessary changes.

9. Prepare a peer review panel terms of reference and advisory report summarizing the panel's evaluation of the stock assessment and addressing each peer review term of reference. Develop a list of tasks to be completed following the workshop. Complete and submit the report within 4 weeks of workshop conclusion.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

TO: **Coastal Pelagics Management Board**

FROM: **Emilie Franke, FMP Coordinator**

DATE: **January 20, 2026**

SUBJECT: **Next Steps and Timeline for Atlantic Cobia Management**

This memorandum outlines next steps for Atlantic cobia management considering the current harvest specifications expire at the end of 2026, the forthcoming revised MRIP time series, and timing of the new stock assessment. This memorandum also notes past Board discussion on the new confidence interval approach that could be considered by the Board at any point.

New Specifications for 2027

The current cobia specifications will expire at the end of 2026. The 2024-2026 total annual harvest quota is 80,112 fish (both sectors combined), which is the same quota level that has been in place since 2020.

Per the FMP, the Board may set new specifications for up to five years after the expiration of previously specified measures or following a completed stock assessment. With the 2024-2026 specifications expiring, new specifications may be set for 2027 through 2031. The FMP notes specifications must be made no later than the Fall Board meeting (2026 Annual Meeting). As in the past, the Cobia Technical Committee (TC) will meet prior to the 2026 Summer Meeting to discuss TC recommendations on the total harvest quota level. However, as outlined during the prior specifications process (Memo 23-69), there are limited data for the TC to consider since projections from the previous stock assessment (SEDAR 58) extend only through 2024.

Regarding the new stock assessment (SEDAR 107) beginning in early 2026, that assessment is anticipated to be complete and undergo peer review in 2027. So, the new assessment may be available to inform 2028 quota levels and beyond.

Recreational Management Measures for 2027

Per the FMP, recreational landings are evaluated against recreational harvest targets at the same time as the specification process. Under the Addendum II regional allocation framework, each region's landings would be evaluated against the region's target as an average of annual landings. The timeframe for this average only includes years with the same recreational management measures (i.e., measures have not changed from year-to-year). If a region's averaged recreational landings exceed its recreational harvest target, that region is required to adjust measures to reduce harvest to the target. Addendum II specifies that a region cannot

liberalize measures before completion of the next assessment (SEDAR 95 now re-numbered to SEDAR 107).

When the Board sets specifications for 2027, an evaluation of recreational landings against the targets would be conducted. Since regional measures changed in 2025 due to the reduction in the Northern Region (RI-VA), only one year of data (2025) would be available for this evaluation to inform 2027 recreational measures. During the last Board meeting in October 2024, the Board noted concern about only having one year of data for the evaluation.

One timing consideration is the revised MRIP time series expected to be released in 2026. The revised MRIP time series could change the regional allocation percentages, which are based on 2014-2023 landings. Addendum II allows the Board to change the allocations via Board action if the underlying MRIP estimates are updated. So, if the revised MRIP time series is available in time for the evaluation in 2026, and if the Board decides to update the allocation percentages based on those revised estimates, then the evaluation could incorporate updated regional allocations and harvest targets to inform 2027 measures.

Another timing consideration is the new stock assessment which could be available to inform 2028 management measures. If the stock assessment leads to a new total harvest quota in 2028, that would also result in updated recreational harvest targets with a new evaluation to determine 2028 recreational measures (one year after considering changes for 2027 recreational measures). Previously, the Board was in a similar scenario during a recreational evaluation to determine 2024 recreational measures while anticipating that 2025 recreational measures may also change since new allocation frameworks were being considered in Addendum II. To address this at the time, the Board requested the TC evaluate the impact of maintaining status quo recreational measures for 2024 in addition to conducting the typical evaluation. Ultimately, the Board decided to maintain status quo recreational measures in 2024 and changed measures in 2025 based on the new regional allocation framework.

Confidence Interval Approach

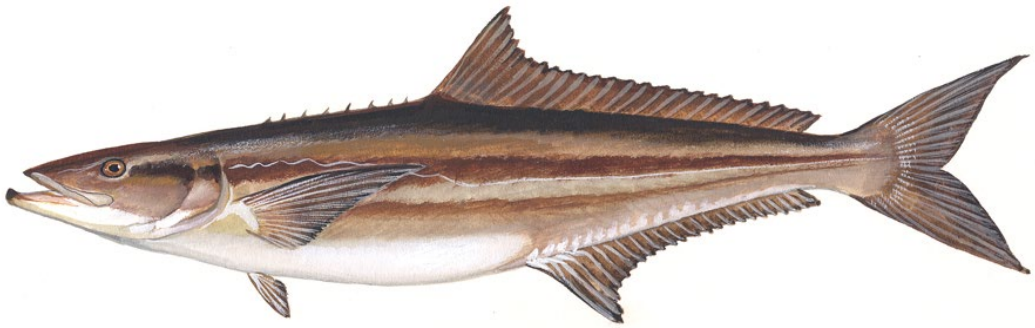
At the last Board meeting in October 2024, the Board reviewed a Cobia TC report on the Addendum II confidence interval provision (Memo 24-79), which allows the Board to switch from the current rolling average approach using point estimates for recreational harvest evaluations to a confidence interval approach using the 95% confidence intervals around the point estimate instead. The TC's 2024 report provided initial input on what the confidence interval approach might look like as applied to current data and explored different confidence interval levels besides 95% (Note: the confidence interval level can only be changed via addendum). Overall, the TC noted that more time to consider this approach would be beneficial, including discussion by the Board of how the rolling average and confidence interval approaches would align with their management goals. The Board agreed that Board input is needed to inform further TC discussion, but the best way to gather that input is not clear. Additionally, the confidence interval approach is one of several issues to consider simultaneously along with the stock assessment timeline and the challenge of setting future specifications and recreational management measures.

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

REVIEW OF THE INTERSTATE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

FOR ATLANTIC COBIA
(*Rachycentron canadum*)

2024 FISHING YEAR



For Board Review
January 2026

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

Table of Contents

I. Status of the Fishery Management Plan

Date of FMP Approval:	Original FMP – November 2017
Amendments & Addenda:	Amendment 1 – August 2019 Addendum 1 – October 2020
Management Areas:	The distribution of the Atlantic stock of cobia from Georgia through Rhode Island
Active Boards/Committees:	Coastal Pelagics Management Board; Cobia Technical Committee, Plan Development Team, and Plan Review Team; South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel

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 Coastal Pelagics Board (Board). Through the FMP, regulations for states with a declared interest were required to reflect several measures established federally through the CMP FMP.

In March, 2019, Regulatory Amendment 31 to the CMP FMP became effective (SAFMC, 2018). This removed Atlantic cobia from the CMP FMP, resulting in management solely through the ASMFC.

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 were 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.

There are four plan objectives:

1) Provide a flexible management system to address future changes in resource abundance, scientific information, and fishing patterns among user groups or areas.

2) Promote cooperative collection of biological, economic, and social data required to effectively monitor and assess the status of the cobia resource and evaluate management efforts.
3) Manage the cobia fishery to protect both young individuals and established breeding stock.
4) Develop research priorities that will further refine the cobia management program to maximize the biological, social, and economic benefits derived from the cobia population.

In February, 2020, the Board approved an annual total harvest quota of 80,112 fish for 2020-2022, based on results from the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) 58 stock assessment for Atlantic cobia, allocated to the recreational and commercial sectors based on the Amendment 1 allocation of 92% recreational and 8% commercial. However, states with commercial harvest had an agreement to harvest a smaller portion of that amount in 2020. SEDAR 58 used updated recreational catch estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program's (MRIP) 2018 transition and calibration to the mail-based Fishing Effort Survey effort estimates, which replaced those of the Coastal Household Telephone Survey.

Given the increased recreational catch estimates used in the SEDAR 58 assessment, the total annual quota approved by the Board also increased, resulting in increases to both the recreational and commercial quotas. As this increase in recreational harvest did not truly reflect a change in previous effort, only the estimate of that effort, Addendum I to Amendment 1 was approved by the Board in October 2020 to reconsider the percent allocations to the commercial and recreational sectors to better reflect the observed harvest. The Addendum changed the allocation of the resource between the recreational and commercial fisheries from 92% and 8%, respectively, to 96% and 4%, respectively. The calculation of the commercial trigger, which determines when an in season coastwide commercial closure occurs, was also revised. The Addendum established a commercial *de minimis* set aside of 4% of the commercial quota with a maximum cap of 5,000 pounds to account for potential landings in *de minimis* states not tracked in-season against the quota. The Addendum also allowed states that are *de minimis* for their recreational fisheries to choose to match the recreational management measures implemented by an adjacent non-de minimis state (or the nearest non-de minimis state if none are adjacent) or limit their recreational fishery to 1 fish per vessel per trip with a minimum size of 33 inches fork length (or an equivalent total length of 37 inches). Based on maturity data from the SEDAR 58 assessment, this latter regulatory option was updated from 29 inches fork length to 33 inches fork length in Addendum I to allow a greater number of females to spawn before being susceptible to harvest. Addendum I measures were effective January 1, 2021.

In May 2022, the Board changed the cobia quota timeframe from 2020-2022 to 2021-2023, thereby, maintaining the total harvest quota of 80,112 fish for the 2023 fishing season. For the 2024-2026 fishing seasons, the total harvest quota for both sectors combined is 80,112 fish, which is the same harvest quota that has been in place since 2020.

In 2023, in response to increased cobia harvest in some Mid-Atlantic states, as well as concerns about high uncertainty associated with cobia recreational harvest estimates, especially at the state level, the Board initiated Addendum II. Approved in 2024, Addendum II modifies the recreational allocation framework, allows the Board to update allocations quickly if the underlying data are

revised, expands the range of data used in harvest evaluations, and allows the Board to set management measures for a longer period of time. Notably, Addendum II changes both the geographic scope of the recreational allocation framework and the timeframe of data used as the basis for allocations. The Addendum changes the recreational allocation framework from a state-by-state to a regional framework, with a northern region of Rhode Island through Virginia and a southern region of North Carolina through Georgia. The new regional allocation framework is intended to reduce uncertainty by using harvest estimates based on a larger sample size combining multiple states in a region, instead of individual state-level harvest estimates. Each region is allocated part of the recreational quota based on each region's percentage of the coastwide harvest in number of fish over the last ten years, combining 50% of 2014-2023 data and 50% of 2018-2023 data. This results in 68.7% of the recreational quota available to the northern region and 31.3% of the quota available to the southern region. Using the more recent data, as compared to previously using 2006-2015 data, accounts for changes in harvest and potential range expansion of the species in recent years. This new recreational allocation framework was applied starting in 2025.

2024 and 2025 Measures

With a total harvest quota for both sectors of 80,112 fish for the 2024-2026 fishing seasons, the 4% allocation to the commercial sector results in an annual commercial quota of 73,116 pounds. The current management measures for the commercial fishery include a 33" FL (or 37" total length) minimum size limit and 2 fish limit per person, with a 6 fish maximum vessel limit. The commercial Atlantic cobia fishery will close once the commercial quota is projected to be reached as determined by the commercial closure trigger.

Per the 96% allocation to the recreational sector, the coastwide recreational harvest target for 2024-2026 fishing seasons is 76,908 fish. For 2024, the previous state allocations were in place resulting in the following state targets for recreational harvest:

Georgia - 7,229 fish
South Carolina - 9,306 fish
North Carolina - 29,302 fish
Virginia - 30,302 fish
De minimis - 769 fish

When the Board set the total harvest quota for 2024-2026, the Board would typically consider changes to state recreational management measures starting that first year (2024) by comparing each state's recent harvest to state harvest targets. However, the Board considered a Technical Committee analysis reviewing the impacts of maintaining status quo recreational management measures, and ultimately, the Board chose to maintain status quo state waters recreational management measures for the 2024 fishing season while a new addendum was considered regarding recreational allocations.

For 2025, the new regional targets for recreational targets were in place under Addendum II:

Southern Region (NC through GA) - 24,083 fish
Northern Region (RI through VA) - 52,825 fish

To determine 2025 recreational measures, each region's average harvest from 2021-2023 was compared to the region's target. The Northern Region average harvest was above its target resulting in a 15.9% reduction. The Southern Region average harvest was below its target so states in that region maintained status quo measures.

II. Status of the Stock

SEDAR 58

In 2020, the Board approved the SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) 58 Atlantic Cobia benchmark assessment for management use which continued to use the Beaufort Assessment Model (BAM), a forward-projecting statistical catch-at-age model used in the prior assessment, SEDAR 28 (SEDAR 2013). SEDAR 58 provided new reference points and determined that the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring (Figures 1 and 2). This assessment had a terminal year of 2017, and used the recalibrated recreational catch data from MRIP, which yielded much higher biomass and spawning stock biomass estimates as compared to SEDAR 28 (Figure 3). Even with the large changes in biomass estimates, the trends of abundance, recruitment, and relative status were very similar between the two assessments. Stock structure also remained unchanged from the SEDAR 28 assessment which established the stock boundary between Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico cobia at the FL/GA border with the Atlantic stock extending northward to Rhode Island.

The assessment proposed updated reference points of $F_{40\%}$ and 75% of $SSB_{F40\%}$ as the threshold reference points (Figures 4 and 5). The reference points were selected as the fishing rate and SSB that allows the population to reach 40% of the maximum spawning potential the stock would have obtained in the absence of harvest. These reference points serve as proxies for maximum sustainable yield-derived relationships due to insufficient data for cobia.

Spawning stock biomass showed little overall trend throughout the estimated time series, but the terminal year is the lowest in the time series. Age structure estimated by the base run indicated a slight decline in the number of younger fish in the last decade, but the rest of the age structure was above the expected values in 2017. The estimated fishing mortality rates have generally increased through the assessment time frame, peaking in 1996, with the recreational fleet as the largest contributor to total F ($F_{2015\text{-}2017}/F_{40\%} = 0.29$).

SEDAR 107

The next stock assessment for Atlantic cobia is underway with an expected completion date of mid-2027. The stock assessment initially began in March 2024 through the SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process under SEDAR 95. However, the assessment was paused starting in September 2024 due to no lead analyst being available. A new lead analyst will begin in 2026 and the assessment has been transitioned to the Commission assessment process with the peer review coordinated by SEDAR in early 2027.

III. Status of the Fishery

Regulations, by state, for the 2024 fishing year are presented in Table 1. Total Atlantic cobia landings (commercial and recreational) are estimated at about 1.7 million pounds in 2024, which is a 40% decrease from 2023 (Figure 6, Tables 2 and 3). This decrease was driven by a decrease in recreational landings, while commercial landings slightly increased. The commercial and recreational fisheries harvested 4% and 96% of the 2024 total, respectively.

Coastwide commercial landings show an increasing trend since low harvests in the 1970s and early 1980s, but comprise a small portion of the total harvest due, in part, to the current 4% allocation of the total annual harvest quota since 2021 (Figure 6); the commercial allocation was 8% prior to 2021. For the past five years, commercial landings have stayed between 64,000 and 75,000 pounds. Coastwide cobia commercial landings in 2024 were estimated at 70,546 pounds, which is a 10% increase from 2023 commercial landings. The commercial quota of 73,116 pounds was not exceeded in 2024. Virginia (56%) and North Carolina (40%) harvested the majority of the commercial landings in 2024 (Table 2).

The total non-*de minimis* commercial landings reached the commercial trigger level for fishery closure on November 18, so the commercial fishery in state waters were closed starting December 18 through the end of the year. NOAA Fisheries implemented a complementary closure for the same timeframe in federal waters.

Recreational harvests have fluctuated widely throughout the time series, often through rapid increases and declines. Average annual recreational harvest for the time series is 40,869 fish (1.1 million pounds) (Figures 6-7, Table 3-4). This fishery has grown noticeably over the time series, with average annual harvests over the last 10 years of 79,789 fish (2.4 million pounds). The 2024 recreational harvest was 54,289 fish (1.6 million pounds), which is below the coastwide recreational harvest target 0f 76,908 fish. 2024 harvest decreased by 45% in number of fish from 2023 and is the lowest harvest since 2017.

From 2018-2024, Virginia harvested the majority of the coastwide recreational cobia, comprising an average of 72% of coastwide recreational harvest by number each year. North Carolina has the second highest recreational harvest with an average of 13% of coastwide recreational harvest by number each year for the same timeframe. South Carolina and Georgia have averaged 6.5% and 5.5% of the coastwide recreational harvest annually for the same timeframe, and states north of Virginia comprised the remainder (3% on average annually). Since 2018, recreational landings have increased in some Mid-Atlantic states, notably Virginia, while remaining relatively stable in southern states, indicating a range expansion is more likely than a stock shift.

It should be noted that North Carolina's estimated recreational harvest in 2023-2024 was very low at 629 fish in 2023 and 3,631 fish in 2024, as compared to the 12,403 average harvest from the previous five years (2018-2022). North Carolina noted in their compliance report that the cobia fishery is a pulse fishery, with the primary wave of fish historically arriving in late May and being available for about 6 weeks. In recent years, anecdotal observations suggest cobia are migrating to

Chesapeake Bay much earlier, in April and May, and are residing in North Carolina for a shorter period of time resulting in fewer recreational catches.

South Carolina's estimated recreational harvest in 2024 of 1,432 fish was also low as compared to the 6,001 average harvest from the previous five years (2019-2023). This 2024 harvest is the lowest for South Carolina since 2017, when federal closures were in place.

For recreational effort, MRIP estimates 567,320 directed cobia angler trips in 2024 (cobia as primary or secondary target), a 21% decrease from 2023. This aligns with the decrease in recreational harvest in 2024.

The PRT notes that changes in harvest and effort can be attributed to multiple factors, including stock distribution, fish availability in nearshore or offshore waters, state regulatory changes, and level of effort. Additionally, the timeframe when cobia are available in some state waters can be very limited, so factors like poor weather conditions during that narrow window can affect effort and harvest.

Recreational releases of live fish have generally increased throughout the time series (Figure 7, Table 5). In 2024, 220,820 recreationally-caught fish were released which represents about 80% of the total recreational catch. From 2018-2023, an average 76% of cobia caught recreationally were released alive each year. This is higher than the average 65% released alive during the period of 2013-2017.

IV. Status of Assessment Advice

Current stock status information comes from SEDAR 58 (SEDAR, 2020), which determined the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Results of this assessment were approved for management use by the Board at their February 2020 meeting, and, as such, have been incorporated into ASMFC's FMP.

The stock assessment could be improved by developing a fishery-independent sampling program for abundance of cobia and other coastal migratory pelagic species. The currently used fishery-dependent index causes notable uncertainty in part due to the lack of an effective sampling methodology. In addition, while the terminal year of the assessment was 2017, due to federal water closures for cobia, the index could only be calculated through 2015 in the previous assessment. The assessment could also benefit from improved characterization of age, reproductive, genetic, and migratory characteristics, tag-based information on natural mortality, and more precise recreational catch estimates.

The next stock assessment for the Atlantic cobia stock is underway with an expected completion date of mid-2027. The terminal year will likely be 2025 and the assessment will likely be available to inform 2028 management measures.

V. Status of Research and Monitoring

There are no monitoring or research programs required annually of the states except for the submission of a compliance report. Fishery-dependent data collections (other than catch and effort data) are conducted in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. Data collected includes length, age, and sex data. Fishery-independent monitoring programs conducted by states that may encounter cobia are conducted in New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, South Carolina, and Georgia. Below are brief summaries of relevant data collection programs reported by states in their compliance reports for Atlantic cobia.

Georgia: The Marine Sportfish Carcass Recovery Project is used to collect biological data from recreationally harvested finfish such as Red Drum, Spotted Seatrout, Southern Flounder, Sheepshead, and Southern Kingfish. Anglers donate filleted whole fish carcasses and GACRD personnel collect the carcasses and process them to determine species, fork length (FL), and sex (when possible). Sagittal otoliths are removed and processed to determine the age of the fish. Cobia are occasionally donated to the project; however, none were donated in 2024.

The Marine Sportfish Population and Heath Survey (MSPHS) is a multi-faceted fishery independent survey used to collect information on the biology and population dynamics of recreationally important finfish. Sampling is ongoing in three Georgia estuaries, Altamaha, St. Andrew, and Wassaw, on a seasonal basis, using entanglement gear (gill nets and trammel nets). Although they are not routinely caught during MSPHS sampling, Cobia are occasionally encountered during sampling events; however, none were caught during 2024.

South Carolina: The SCDNR charterboat logbook program has been in place since 1993 as a mandatory trip-level logbook reporting system for all charter vessels to collect basic catch and effort data. Annual cobia recreational harvest by weight has ranged from 4,152 to 15,638 lbs. with a long term mean of 10,068 lbs. for 2005-2024. The mean annual harvest for years prior to the month of May harvest closure in South Carolina's Southern Management Cobia Zone (1993-2016) was 10,882 lbs. which has since averaged 5,900 lbs. in subsequent years (2018-2024). Since 1998, the charterboat data has shown an increase in the number of Cobia released alive while harvest remained relatively consistent throughout the 2000s and has been on an overall declining trend since 2012. Catch per unit effort (CPUE) in the Cobia charterboat fishery peaked in 1997 and declined afterwards to the series low in 2012. It should be noted that 2012-2014 had the lowest continuous CPUE levels of the time series which also coincided with several management changes, as well as fishery closures that occurred during this time period. There has been a slight uptick in charterboat CPUE in the last several years with a CPUE level above the long-term mean (0.002 fish/trip/angler) since 2018.

There are currently no independent fishery monitoring programs in South Carolina that monitor Cobia. There are a few SCDNR surveys that capture incidental Cobia, but the intercept levels are so low as to not be useful as a proxy abundance index. The SCDNR estuarine trammel net survey has captured only 19 Cobia between 1991-2022 over a total of 24,337 net sets. The SEAMAP nearshore trawl survey conducted from Cape Hatteras, NC to Cape Canaveral, FL by the SCDNR has captured

few Cobia over its history (362 fish over 17,517 tows from 1989-2022), but with a low catch rate of only 11.2 fish/year (1.6% positive tows) over this same time period.

North Carolina: Supplemental length-frequency information for the recreational cobia fishery is collected through the NCDMF Carcass Collection Program. In the last 5 years, mean FL of cobia measured by MRIP has ranged from 34 to 43 inches. In 2024, the minimum FL was 35 inches, and the maximum FL was 52 inches. Mean FL of the cobia collected through the NCDMF Carcass Collection Program is generally similar to MRIP samples. In 2024, the minimum length recorded in the Carcass Collection Program was 32 inches FL and the maximum was 53 inches FL. The number of commercial and recreational sampled fish is low due to low possession limits and the seasonal nature of the cobia fishery in North Carolina.

North Carolina currently does not have any fishery-independent monitoring programs that target or catch cobia in large numbers. The NCDMF initiated a fishery-independent gill net survey in Pamlico Sound in 2001 and expanded its coverage in 2008 to include the Cape Fear and New rivers. Coverage was further expanded to Bogue, Back, and Core sounds in 2018. The objective of this project is to provide annual, independent, relative abundance indices for key estuarine species in North Carolina estuaries. The survey employs a stratified random sampling design and utilizes multiple mesh gill nets (3.0 inch to 6.5 inch stretched mesh, in ½-inch increments). A total of 291 cobia have been captured in the North Carolina Independent Gill Net Survey from 2001 to 2024. Cobia from this survey ranged from six to 38 inches FL with a mean size of 21 inches FL. Due to the low number of positive trips, ranging from <1% to 5% of all sets annually, this survey cannot be used as an index of abundance. While this data has not been considered suitable for an index of abundance for this species, this sampling program is one of the few programs on the Atlantic coast that catches smaller cobia, providing important life history information that may not otherwise be obtained.

Virginia: Virginia currently has a voluntary discard reporting system (Voluntary Recreational Cobia Initiative) and is focused on collecting discard length data from recreational cobia anglers. A total of 26 release lengths were submitted through the new voluntary program in 2024. This program will continue in 2025. Age data will continue to be collected from the preexisting carcass collection program that began in 2007.

Maryland: Cobia are rarely encountered in Maryland's fishery dependent monitoring. One survey which has encountered cobia is the Maryland commercial pound net survey. Since 1993, Maryland has sampled commercial pound nets in the lower portion of Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River. Each site is sampled once every two weeks from May through September, weather and fisherman's schedule permitting. These nets are sampled as part of the fisherman's regular activity; therefore, net soak times and the manner in which they are fished is consistent with the fisherman's day-to-day activities. Between 1993 and 2024, 19 cobia total have been sampled in this survey, though at least one cobia was sampled each year between 2018-2022. Sampled cobia ranged in size from 371-1197 mm. No cobia have been sampled in this survey since 2022.

Cobia have rarely been encountered in Maryland's fishery independent surveys. Almost all of the fishery independent cobia have been sampled in Maryland's coastal bays in two fishery-independent surveys. One survey which has encountered them is the Maryland coastal bays juvenile seine and trawl survey. The Maryland coastal bays have been sampled since 1972, with the sampling protocol standardized in 1982. Shore beach seine sampling is conducted using a 100 foot beach seine at 19 fixed sites once per month, June through September. Trawl sampling occurs at 20 fixed sites on a monthly basis, April through October. Between 1982-2024, just nine cobia have been sampled in the Maryland coastal bays juvenile seine and trawl survey over six years (1989, 1993, 1997, 2002, 2010, and 2021), ranging in size from 151-287 mm. None have been sampled since 2021 in this survey.

The other fishery independent survey in Maryland's coastal bays that has encountered cobia is the Coastal Fisheries Program's submerged aquatic vegetation habitat survey. This survey has been conducted each September since 2015 and uses a 50-foot beach seine to sample varying habitat types. While a single cobia measuring 147 mm was sampled in this survey for the first time in 2020, none were sampled between 2021-2024.

New Jersey: New Jersey does not conduct fishery-independent monitoring of cobia. New Jersey conducts a fishery-independent trawl survey, which historically samples the nearshore ocean waters on five sampling cruises throughout the year. During the entire time series of the survey from 1988 through 2024, a total of 26 cobia were caught and sampled. A total of 2 cobia were caught in the survey in 2024.

VI. Status of Management Measures and Issues

Fishery Management Plan

No management changes were required or implemented in 2024. States maintained the same management measures as 2021-2023.

In January 2024, New York declared an interest in the Atlantic Cobia FMP and its management measures meet the requirements of the FMP.

For the 2024 fishing season, the Board chose to maintain status quo state recreational management measures instead of adjusting measures based on each state's harvest target evaluation while a new draft addendum was developed. For the 2025 fishing season, the Board implemented new recreational allocations which were used to set recreational measures for 2025 with a reduction in the Northern Region and status quo in the Southern Region.

De Minimis

The FMP allows states to request recreational *de minimis* status if their recreational landings in two of the previous three years are less than 1% of annual coastwide recreational landings during that time period. Prior to Addendum II (prior to 2025), if a state qualified for *de minimis*, the state could choose to match all FMP-related recreational management measures (including seasons and vessel limits) implemented by an adjacent non-*de minimis* state (or the nearest non-*de minimis* state if

none are adjacent) or the state could choose to limit its recreational fishery to 1 fish per vessel per trip with a minimum size of 33 inches fork length (or 37 inches total length) with no seasonal restrictions. Those recreational *de minimis* measures were in place for 2024. With the new regional recreational allocation implemented in 2025, there are no longer different recreational measures for recreational *de minimis* states.

Rhode Island, Delaware, Maryland, and Florida requested recreational *de minimis* status through the annual reporting process. All of these states meet the recreational *de minimis* qualifications.

De minimis status for commercial fisheries may be granted to states if their commercial landings for 2 of the previous 3 years were less than 2% of the coastwide commercial landings for the same time period. Commercial regulations in *de minimis* states are the same as non-*de minimis* states and are limited to a minimum size of 33 inches FL (or 37 inches TL) with 2 fish per person for a total of 6 fish per vessel (the same requirements as non-*de minimis* states). Commercial *de minimis* states, however, are not required to monitor their in-season harvests. Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Georgia, and Florida requested *de minimis* status for commercial fisheries through the annual reporting process. All of these states meet the commercial *de minimis* qualifications.

VII. Implementation of FMP Compliance Requirements for 2024

The PRT finds no inconsistencies among states in regard to the Fishery Management Plan.

VIII. Recommendations of the Plan Review Team

Management
The PRT recommends that the Board approve the 2024 FMP Review, state compliance, and all *de minimis* requests from Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Georgia, and Florida.

The PRT emphasizes that multiple states could exceed *de minimis* thresholds over the next few years if cobia landings continue to increase in Mid-Atlantic states due to cobia potentially becoming more available in those areas. The PRT notes the management implications of this, including requiring commercial in-season monitoring in more states. For recreational measures, the *de minimis* designation no longer affects state recreational regulations since new measures must be consistent for the whole region. Though in the long term, the allocation between regions may need to be reevaluated.

The next stock assessment will be critical to better understand trends in the stock and the fishery. The previous assessment had a terminal year of 2017, and this assessment will likely have a terminal year of 2025 which will capture recent trends of higher landings in Mid-Atlantic states and the transition to Commission-only management. The PRT emphasizes the importance of incorporating the revised MRIP time series into the new assessment.

Research

The current stock assessment (SEDAR 95) is facing data limitation challenges for cobia. To support future assessments and management, it is important to consider long-term monitoring and data collection for cobia. The following are important research recommendations the PRT continues to highlight:

- Define, develop, and monitor adult and juvenile abundance estimates through the expansion of current or development of new fishery independent surveys. This recommendation is especially relevant as it is uncertain that the current abundance index used in SEDAR 58 will be able to be updated for the upcoming Atlantic cobia stock assessment scheduled to be completed in 2027.
- Continue to collect and analyze current life history data from fishery independent and dependent programs, including size, age, maturity, histology workups and information on spawning season timing and duration. Increase spatial and temporal coverage of age samples collected regularly from fishery dependent and independent sources.
- Continue collection of genetic material to continue to assess the stock identification and any Distinct Population Segments that may exist within the management unit relative to recommendations made by the SEDAR 58 Stock ID Process.
- Expand existing fishery independent surveys in time and space to better define and cover cobia habitats, including conducting otolith microchemistry studies to identify regional recruitment contributions and new and ongoing satellite tagging programs to help identify spawning and juvenile habitat use and regional recruitment sources.
- Additional work to better understand the impacts of climate change on cobia habitat and range expansion.

Additional research recommendations can be found in Section 2.8 of the SEDAR 58 stock assessment.

IX. References

ASMFC. 2017. Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Migratory Group Cobia. ASMFC, Arlington, VA. 85 p.

SAFMC. 2018. Amendment 31 to the Fishery Management Plan for Coastal Migratory Pelagics Resources in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Region. NOAA Award # FNA10NMF441001. Charleston, SC. 209 pp.

SEDAR. 2013. SEDAR 28 – South Atlantic Cobia Stock Assessment Report. SEDAR, North Charleston SC. 420 pp. available online at: http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/Sedar_Workshops.jsp?WorkshopNum=28

SEDAR. 2020. SEDAR 58 – Atlantic Cobia Stock Assessment Report. SEDAR, North Charleston SC. 500 pp. available online at: http://sedarweb.org/sedar-58

X. Figures

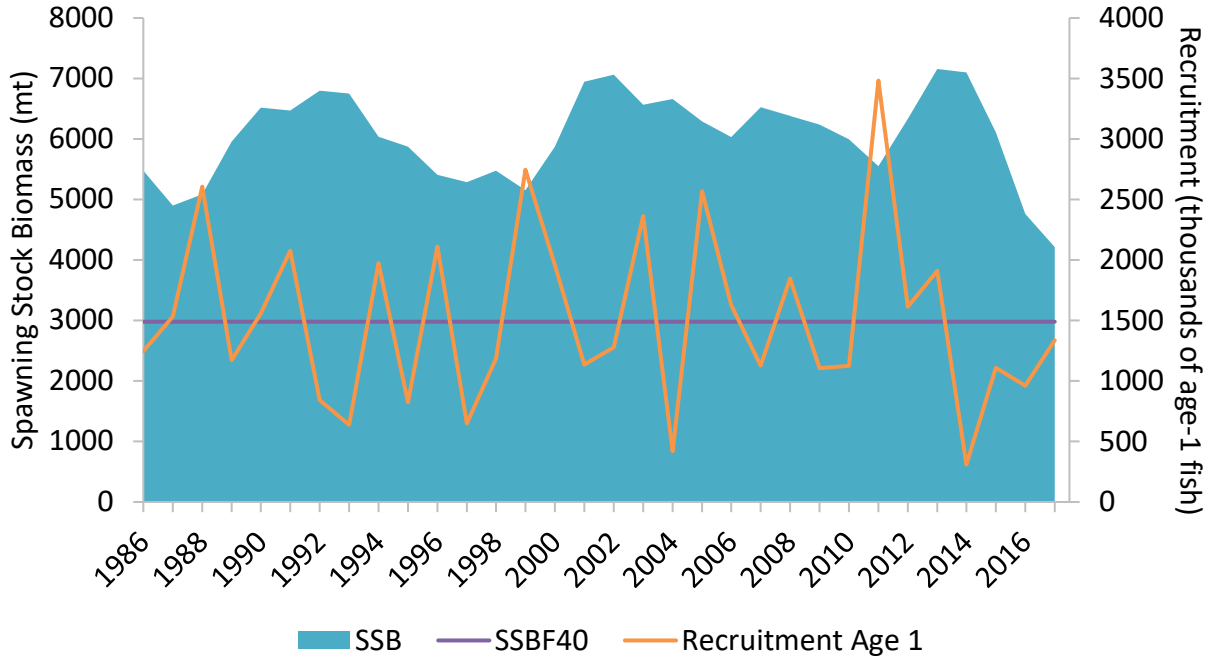


Figure 1. Atlantic Cobia spawning stock biomass (SSB) and recruitment of year 1 fish. (SEDAR, 2020)

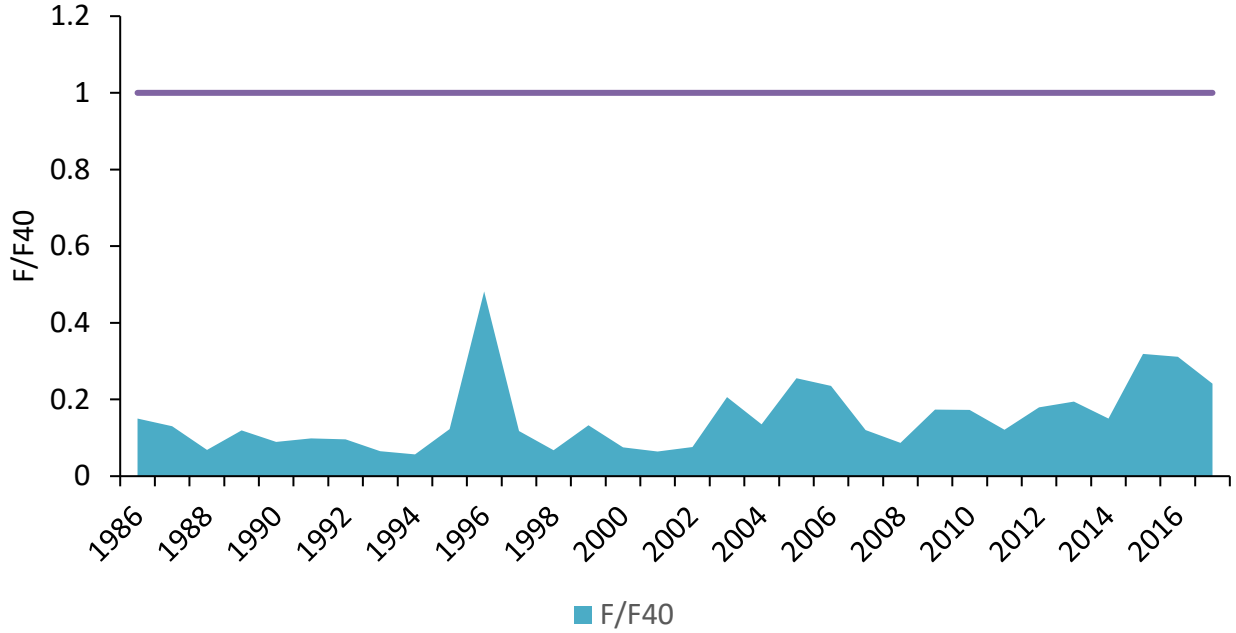


Figure 2. Atlantic Cobia fishing mortality (F) relative to the F40 reference point from 1986-2017. (SEDAR, 2020)

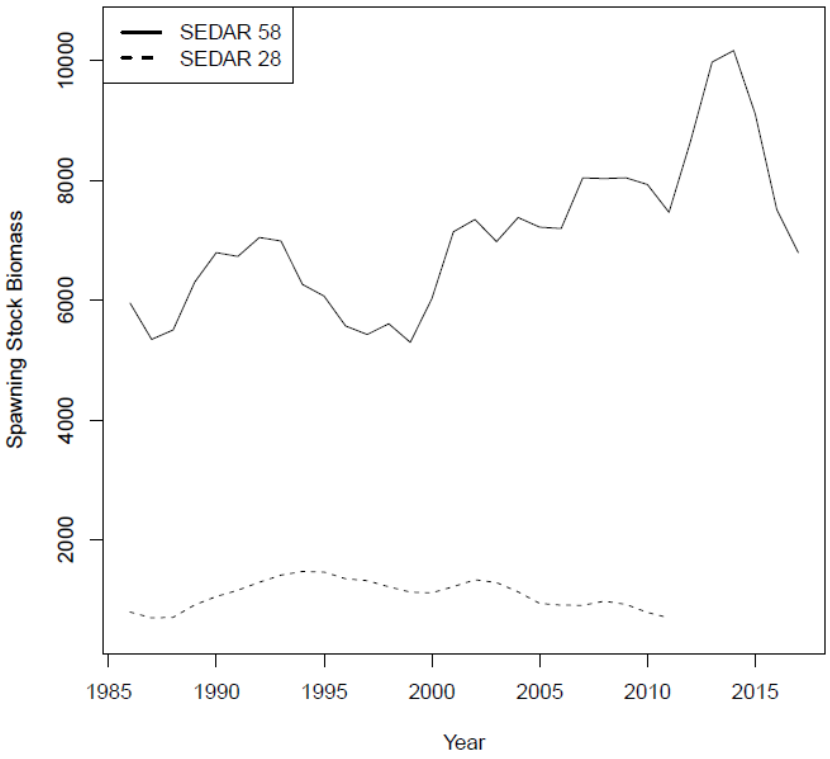


Figure 3. Comparing spawning stock biomass from the current assessment (SEDAR 58) to the previous assessment (SEDAR 28). (SEDAR, 2020)

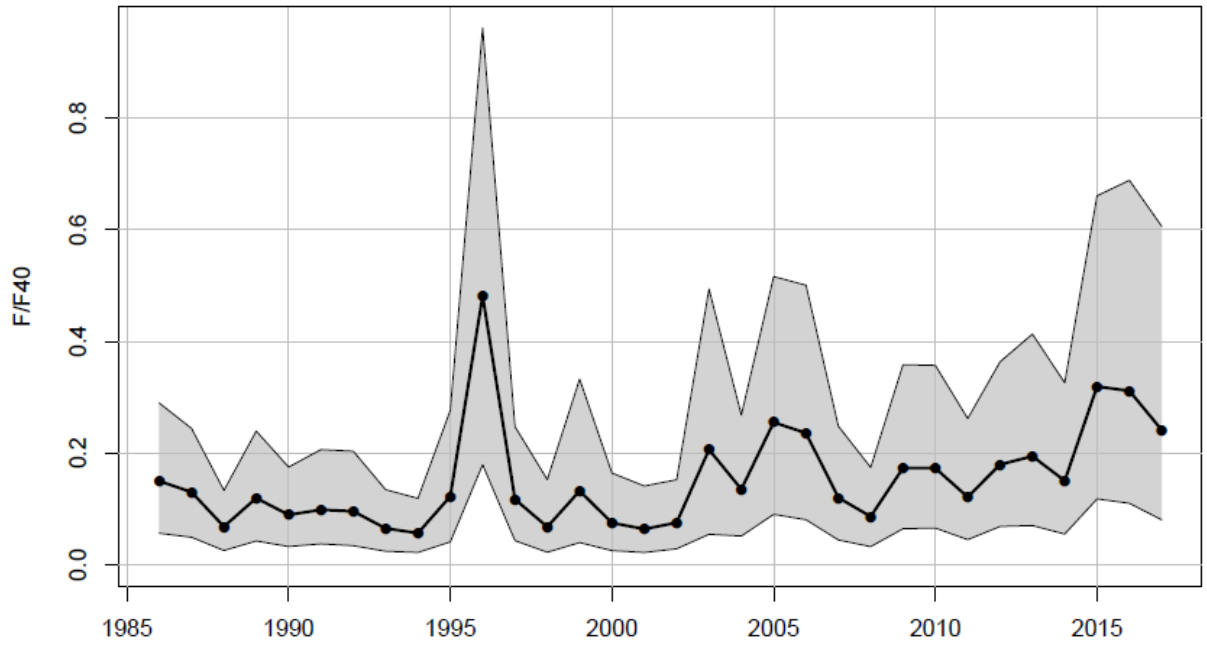


Figure 4. Estimated time series of Fishing Mortality (F) relative to F at Maximum Sustainable Yield ($F_{40\%}$) (SEDAR, 2020).

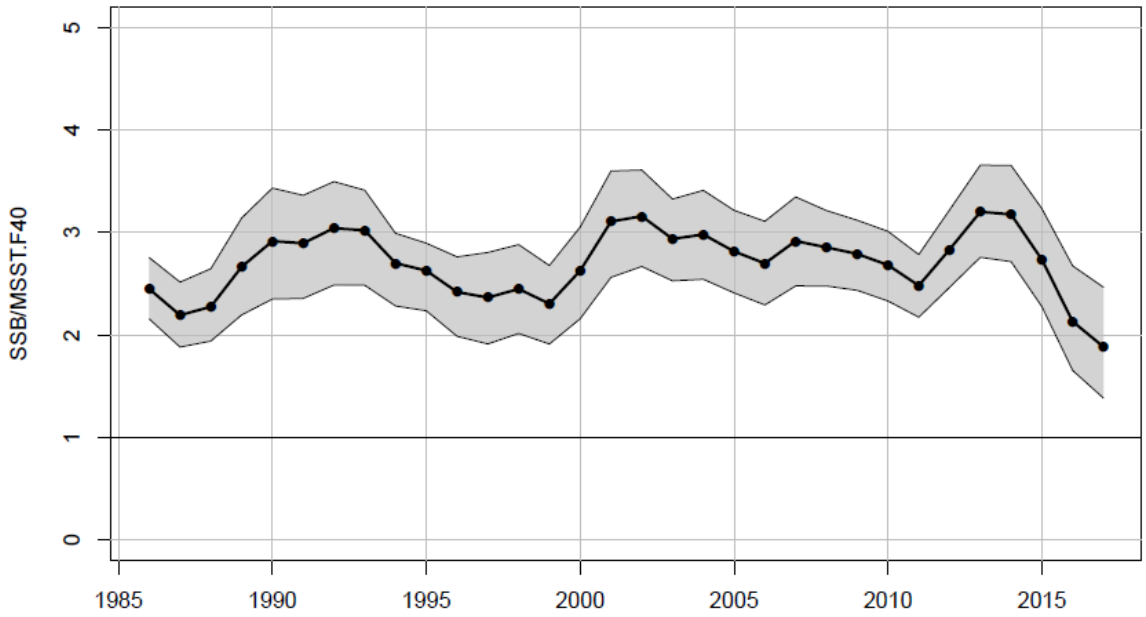


Figure 5. Estimated time series of Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) relative to the Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST) (SEDAR, 2020).

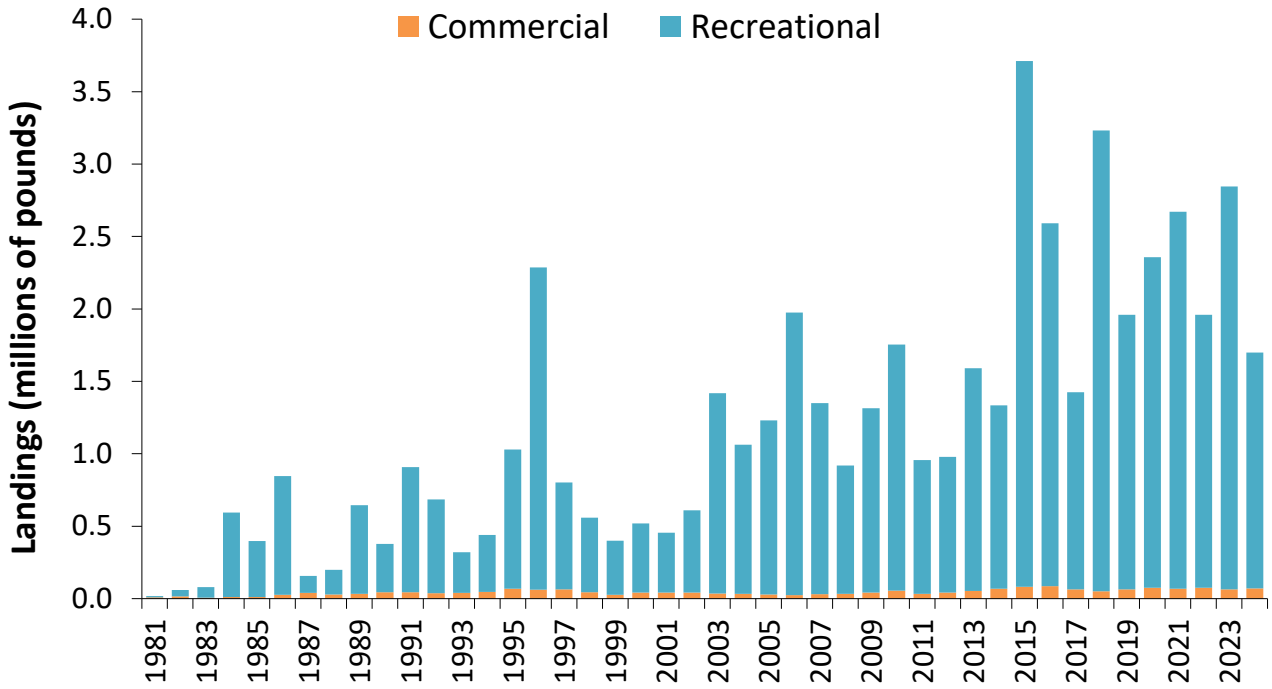


Figure 6. Commercial and recreational landings (pounds) of Atlantic cobia. Recreational data not available prior to 1981. See Tables 2 and 3 for data sources and values from the last ten years.

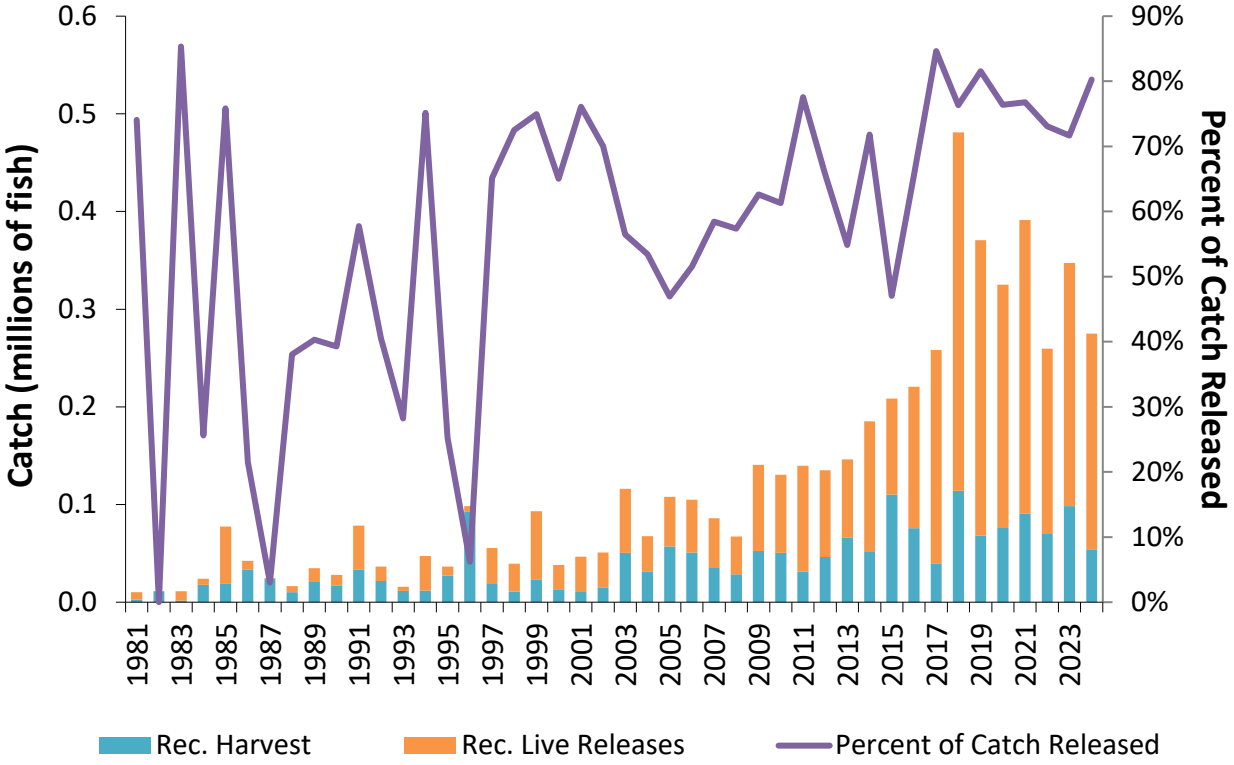


Figure 7. Recreational catch (harvest and live releases) of Atlantic cobia (numbers) and the proportion of catch that is released. See Tables 4 and 5 for data sources and values from the last ten years.

XI. Tables

Table 1. Atlantic cobia regulations for 2024.

State	Recreational Measures	Commercial Measures
RI	*De minimis* Minimum Size: 37 in total length Vessel Limit: 1 fish per vessel Season: year-round	<u>Coastwide</u> Possession Limit: 2 fish per person Minimum Size: 33 in fork length or 37 in total length Vessel Limit: 6 fish If commercial fishing in state waters is closed, commercial fishing in federal waters will be recommended to mirror state closures <u>Deviations</u> -Rhode Island and New York possession limit is 2 fish per vessel -Virginia possession limit is per licensee rather than per person -North Carolina has 36 minimum fork length -No commercial harvest in South Carolina state waters -Georgia possession limit is 1 fish per person (not to exceed 6 per vessel) and minimum size is 36 in fork length -Georgia state waters close to commercial fishing when federal waters close
NY	*De minimis* Minimum Size: 37 in total length Vessel Limit: 1 fish per vessel Season: year-round	
NJ	*De minimis* Minimum Size: 37 in total length Vessel Limit: 1 fish per vessel Season: year-round	
DE	*De minimis* Minimum Size: 37 in total length Bag Limit: 1 fish per vessel Vessel Limit: 1 fish per vessel	
MD	*De minimis* Minimum Size: 40 in total length Bag Limit: 1 fish per person Vessel Limit: 2 fish per vessel Season: June 15-September 15	
PRFC	Minimum Size: 40 in total length (only 1 fish over 50” per vessel) Bag limit: 1 per person Vessel Limit: 2 fish per vessel Season: June 15-September 15	
VA	Minimum Size: 40 in total length (only 1 fish over 50” per vessel) Bag Limit: 1 fish per person Vessel Limit: 2 fish per vessel Season: June 15-September 15	

State	Recreational Measures	Commercial Measures
NC	Minimum Size: 36 in fork length Bag Limit: 1 fish per person Season: May 1-December 31 <u>Private Vessel Limit</u> May 1- June 30: 2 fish July 1-Dec 31: 1 fish <u>For-Hire Vessel Limit</u> May 1-Dec 31: 4 fish	
SC	Bag Limit: 1 fish per person Minimum Size: 36 in fork length Vessel Limit: 6 fish Season: Open year-round <u>Southern Cobia Management Zone:</u> Minimum Size: 36 in FL Season: June 1-April 30 (closed in May) Bag Limit: 1 fish per person Vessel Limit: 3 fish -If recreational fishing in federal waters is closed, recreational fishing in all SC state waters is also closed.	
GA	Bag Limit: 1 fish per person Minimum Size: 36 in fork length Vessel Limit: 6 fish Season: March 1-October 31	
***Florida has a declared interest in the Atlantic Coastal Migratory Group, but their cobia fisheries are managed as part of the Gulf of Mexico Migratory Group due to cobia stock boundaries.**		

Table 2. Commercial landings (pounds) of Atlantic cobia by state, 2015-2024. Sources: 2025 state compliance reports for 2024 fishing year; for years prior to 2024, personal communication with Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program [ACCSP].

Year	RI	CT*	NY	NJ	DE	MD	PRFC	VA	NC	SC	GA	Total
2015	C		235	C		C		25,352	52,684	2,487	C	82,117
2016	183		114	312		C	1,642	32,131	48,252	4,533	C	87,168
2017	115		81	C		C	C	34,069	20,842	4,591	C	64,124
2018	290	C	400	707		C		25,194	20,629	3,026	C	50,953
2019	352		1,191	C	C	C	2,375	33,496	21,553	2,619	C	64,741
2020	844	C	5,182	699	C	C	378	27,768	38,344	1,588	C	75,150
2021	797	C	1,754	2,230		C	816	29,386	29,301	2,324	C	67,711
2022	83		1,537	C		C	147	38,572	32,711	1,565		75,456
2023	139	C	436	1,211		C		29,824	31,301	1,500		64,411
2024	C		161	918	C	619	C	39,195	28,560	765	C	70,546

C: confidential landings.

*CT does not have a declared interest in Atlantic migratory cobia.

Table 3. Recreational harvest (pounds) of Atlantic cobia by state, 2015-2024. Source: Personal communication with MRIP queried August 2025.

Year	RI	CT*	NY	NJ	DE	MD	VA	NC	SC	GA	Total
2015							1,166,000	1,925,762	434,899	102,917	3,629,578
2016						307	1,505,528	838,363	159,345		2,503,543
2017							488,287	872,861		390	1,361,538
2018		4,136			15,053	4,647	2,259,661	685,962	205,647	6,081	3,181,187
2019							1,573,485	254,963	64,937	1,632	1,895,017
2020		1,595				38,991	1,541,393	407,883	247,250	44,976	2,282,088
2021				6,060		131,129	1,722,619	356,340	217,129	170,356	2,603,633
2022			144,715	20,970			1,129,258	306,411	139,599	142,606	1,883,559
2023							2,467,557	12,523	87,486	212,679	2,780,245
2024				2,184		42,774	1,376,436	103,272	37,219	65,233	1,627,118

*CT does not have a declared interest in Atlantic migratory cobia.

Table 4. Recreational harvest (numbers of fish) of Atlantic cobia by state, 2015-2024. Coastwide harvest shaded in red if coastwide harvest target of 76,908 fish for 2020-2024 was exceeded. Source: Personal communication with MRIP queried August 2025.

Year	RI	CT*	NY	NJ	DE	MD	VA	NC	SC	GA	Total
2015							38,672	47,110	15,575	8,934	110,291
2016						56	43,780	26,421	5,437		75,694
2017							14,613	25,025		19	39,657
2018		569			581	206	80,679	25,331	6,340	233	113,939
2019							55,770	10,090	2,381	72	68,313
2020		219				1,360	50,287	15,067	7,650	2,203	76,786
2021				250		5,084	57,135	10,970	8,858	8,510	90,807
2022			3,462	711			39,668	12,330	6,988	6,641	69,800
2023	361						81,824	629	4,129	11,368	98,311
2024				75		1,630	44,954	3,631	1,432	2,567	54,289

*CT does not have a declared interest in Atlantic migratory cobia.

Table 5. Recreational live releases (numbers of fish) of Atlantic cobia by state, 2015-2024.
Source: Personal communication with MRIP queried August 2025.

Year	MA*	RI	CT*	NY	NJ	DE	MD	VA	NC	SC	GA	Total
2015					416			40,689	44,254	12,369	283	98,011
2016							1,075	81,482	39,237	20,255	2,917	144,966
2017								77,184	125,251	11,359	4,830	218,624
2018					2,879		12,090	194,865	68,219	71,020	18,056	367,129
2019					10,166	30	251	184,716	38,285	59,724	9,080	302,252
2020				2,979		564	8,233	146,913	51,158	23,384	15,091	245,343
2021						197	12,344	187,872	40,136	39,341	20,578	300,468
2022				722				84,150	46,777	43,131	14,828	189,608
2023	1,554	450			3,582			141,956	32,590	39,864	28,894	248,890
2024							792	145,123	23,992	41,377	9,536	220,820

*MA and CT do not have a declared interest in Atlantic migratory cobia.

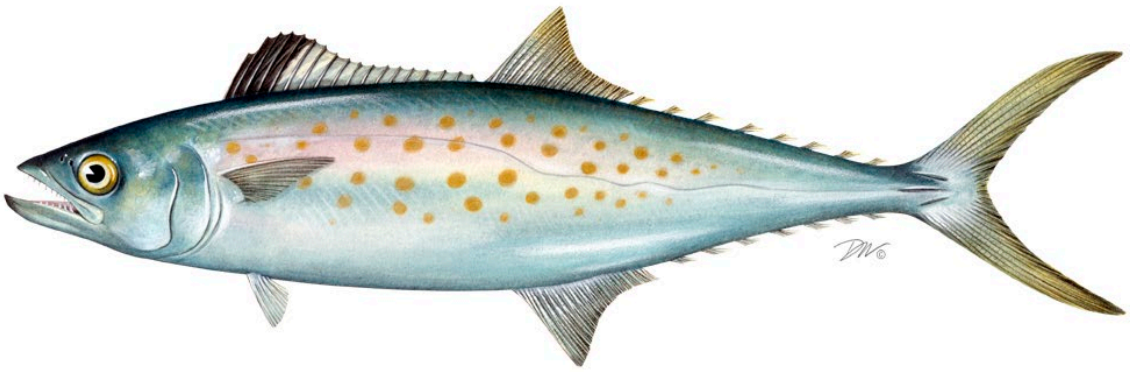
ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

REVIEW OF THE INTERSTATE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

FOR

SPANISH MACKEREL
(*Scomberomorus maculatus*)

2023 and 2024 FISHING YEARS



For Board Review
January 2026

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

Table of Contents

I. Status of the Plan

Date of FMP Approval: Original FMP – November 1990

Amendments: Omnibus Amendment to Spanish Mackerel, Spot, and Spotted Seatrout (Amendment 2) – August 2011

Addendum: Addendum I – August 2013

Management Area: The Atlantic coast distribution of the resource from Rhode Island through the east coast of Florida

Active Boards/Committees: Coastal Pelagics Management Board; Spanish Mackerel Plan Review Team; South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel

The Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources (1983 and subsequent amendments) and the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Spanish Mackerel (1990) manage Atlantic group Spanish mackerel in federal and state Atlantic waters from Rhode Island through the east coast of Florida. All states in that range, excluding Pennsylvania, have a declared interest in the Interstate FMP for Spanish mackerel. The Coastal Pelagics Management Board serves to manage Spanish mackerel for the Commission. The Interstate FMP for Spanish mackerel is a flexible document intended to track the federal FMP; thus, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) has the lead on Atlantic group Spanish mackerel management.

Amendment 1/Omnibus Amendment to the Spanish mackerel FMP, as part of an Omnibus Amendment to the ISFMP Management Plans for Spanish Mackerel, Spot, and Spotted Seatrout, was approved in August 2011. The primary objective of this amendment was to bring the FMPs for all three species under the authority of ACFCMA to provide more efficient and effective management and changes to management for the future. In addition, the amendment made the Commission's Spanish mackerel FMP consistent with federal Spanish mackerel requirements determined by the SAFMC.

Addendum I was approved in August 2013 to allow for a two-year pilot program (2013 and 2014) that allowed states to reduce the minimum size limit of Spanish mackerel for the commercial pound net fishery to 11.5 inches from 12 inches for July through September. The measure was intended to reduce waste of these shorter fish, which are discarded dead in the summer months, by converting them to landed fish that will be counted against the quota.

The South Atlantic Board formally extended the provisions of Addendum I for the 2015 through 2018 fishing seasons. After 2018, North Carolina, the only state to implement the reduced minimum size limit, stopped requesting approval of the program due to no further request from pound net fishermen to continue the program, and due to recent closures in federal waters.

The goals of the ISFMP are to complement federal management in state waters, to conserve the Atlantic group Spanish mackerel resource throughout its range and to achieve compatible management among the states that harvest Spanish mackerel. In accordance with the 2011 Omnibus Amendment, the updated FMP's objectives are to:

1. Manage the Spanish mackerel fishery by restricting fishing mortality to rates below the threshold fishing mortality rates to provide adequate spawning potential to sustain long-term abundance of the Spanish mackerel populations.
2. Manage the Spanish mackerel stock to maintain the spawning stock biomass above the target biomass levels.
3. Minimize endangered species bycatch in the Spanish mackerel fishery.
4. Provide a flexible management system that coordinates management activities between state and federal waters to promote complementary regulations throughout Spanish mackerel's range which minimizes regulatory delay while retaining substantial ASMFC, Council, and public input into management decisions; and which can adapt to changes in resource abundance, new scientific information and changes in fishing patterns among user groups or by area.
5. Develop research priorities that will further refine the Spanish mackerel management program to maximize the biological, social, and economic benefits derived from the Spanish mackerel population. See Table 1 for state Spanish mackerel regulations.

The SAFMC manages Atlantic group Spanish mackerel with guidance from its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The SAFMC determines needed adjustments to regulatory measures, including allowable catch, bag limits, size limits, and trip limits. The SAFMC deliberations are assisted by a Mackerel Cobia Committee, and an Advisory Panel with South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic industry representation. Since the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources FMP is a joint plan with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC), any plan amendments to this FMP must be approved by both Councils. Actions that can be completed through the Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMP's framework procedure and only address Atlantic group Spanish mackerel, do not require approval from the GMFMC.

Several inconsistencies between the Interstate FMP and the federal FMP have been brought to the Board's attention (Appendix I). The Board intends to address these differences during the next management action.

II. Status of the Stocks

In 2012, Spanish mackerel was assessed and peer reviewed through the SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR). The results of the 2012 assessment (SEDAR 28) indicated that the stock was not overfished and was not experiencing overfishing. In 2022, an operational assessment (i.e., update to the last assessment) was completed through the SEDAR process with data through 2020. This most recent assessment (SEDAR 78) indicates the same stock status: the stock is not overfished and is not experiencing overfishing based on a three-year average of fishing mortality. However, in the terminal year of the assessment (2020), the model found the estimated fishing rate to be above the maximum fishing mortality threshold (Figure

1) indicating that if the 2020 overfishing rate continues, the stock may fall into an overfishing status. For spawning stock biomass, the assessment indicates spawning biomass has remained above SSBMSY throughout the time series (Figure 2).

III. Status of the Fishery

On July 1, 2018, the Marine Recreational Information Program recalibrated recreational harvest estimates from the Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) to the mail-based Fishing Effort Survey (FES). Estimates used in this report are now those of the FES. The federal FMP quotas are still based on previous CHTS estimates, but FES estimates will be incorporated into management through a future Plan Amendment to the Federal Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMP.

Spanish mackerel are an important recreational and commercial fishery in South Atlantic waters with variable landings in the Mid-Atlantic region (Tables 2-4). While the fishery is managed according to a March – February fishing year, landings summarized in this report are shown by calendar year, unless otherwise stated. Florida landings included in this report are for the Atlantic coast only.

Total landings of Spanish mackerel in were an estimated 8.0 million pounds in calendar year 2023 and 8.2 million pounds in 2024. In 2023, 36% of landings were from the commercial fishery and 64% from the recreational fishery. In 2024, 33% of landings were from the commercial fishery and 67% from the recreational fishery.

Only three states, Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia, have directed commercial fisheries for Spanish mackerel. Coastwide commercial landings have consistently been below 4 million pounds since 1995, coinciding with the net limitation amendment in Florida, except for 2010 (4.5 million pounds), 2011 (4.3 million pounds), and 2021 (4.8 million pounds). Gill nets were the dominant commercial gear in Florida prior to the ban, after which the use of cast nets increased.

Coastwide commercial landings peaked in 2021 at 4.8 million pounds followed by a decrease to 2.4 million pounds in 2022, 2.8 million pounds in 2023, and 2.7 million pounds in 2024 (Figure 3). From 2022-2024, Florida comprised 57% of coastwide landings on average each year, North Carolina 32% on average each year, and Virginia 9% on average each year. In the previous decade from 2012-2021, Florida comprised a higher proportion with 76% of coastwide landings on average each year, North Carolina 22% on average each year, and Virginia a lower 1% on average each year.

Notably, commercial landings in Virginia from 2019-2024 have been consistently higher than landings in the previous decade. Virginia noted one factor contributing to consistent commercial landings in recent years is its extended drift gill net program implemented in 2022. Experimental permits were issued from 2022-2024 allowing harvesters to fish up to 6,000 feet of continuous drift gillnet to determine whether this longer single net is more effective at catching Spanish mackerel than several separate shorter gillnets. A stipulation with this

experimental gear permit was allowing Virginia Marine Resources Commission observer staff on the boat to note bycatch and evaluate the effectiveness of the new gear. Virginia increased the number of permits each year and ultimately instituted a licensed fishery for this gear type in 2025. During the first year of the fully licensed fishery in 2025, fish availability in the Chesapeake Bay was limited due to high water temperatures and harvesters indicated significant effort was required to find and follow the fish in ocean waters (within state waters). Future landings from this fishery will depend on several factors including fish availability and market conditions.

For the recreational fishery, coastwide recreational landings peaked in 2021 at 8.8 million pounds (7.3 million fish) followed by a decrease to 4.0 million pounds (4.0 million fish) in 2022, 5.2 million pounds (4.3 million fish) in 2023, and 5.5 million pounds (4.2 million fish) in 2024 (Figure 3; Tables 3 and 4). Though lower than the 2021 peak, 2023-2024 landings were above the ten-year average landings.

The number of recreationally harvested fish appears to show a cyclical trend, with low harvest years interspersed with higher harvests (Figure 4). Florida and North Carolina have historically accounted for the majority of recreational landings in both number and weight. In 2024, Florida landed 30% of the coastwide recreational landings by weight, North Carolina landed 49%, South Carolina landed 9%, and Virginia landed 8%. On average each year in the past decade 2015-2024, Florida landed 40% of the coastwide total on average each year, North Carolina 36%, South Carolina 11%, and Virginia 8%.

The number of recreational releases of Spanish mackerel generally increased over time to a peak in 2021 of 5.8 million fish released, which aligns with the peak in landings. Similar to harvest, releases in 2022-2023 decreased to 4.3 million fish and 4.1 million fish, respectively. In 2024, releases further decreased to 2.8 million fish. Live releases comprised 49% of the total recreational catch in 2023 and 40% of total recreational catch in 2024, bracketing the 10-year average of 46%.

For recreational effort, MRIP estimates there were 3.0 million directed trips for Spanish mackerel (primary or secondary target) in 2023, consistent with the 5-year average. In 2024, directed trips decreased to 2.6 million trips.

North Carolina flagged the state's MRIP estimates for 2024. North Carolina's 2024 recreational landings estimate of 2.7 million pounds is 77% higher in pounds than the ten-year average (52% higher in number of fish). North Carolina's 2024 recreational releases estimate of 1.5 million fish is 30% higher than the ten-year average. North Carolina noted these estimates appear unusually high and warrant closer scrutiny. The state notes these figures diverge from anecdotal observations and may have been skewed by a limited number of intercepts with only 343 fish measured, which is significantly fewer than the 1,091 recorded the previous year and the 10-year average of 1,203 measurements. The PSEs for North Carolina's 2024 MRIP estimates are in the twenties. While PSEs in the twenties are generally acceptable across many species, Spanish mackerel typically show more precision with North Carolina PSEs typically in

the teens, making this deviation particularly noteworthy. For the previous decade of 2014-2023, PSEs for North Carolina's Spanish mackerel estimates were between 12-18 except for one year above 20.

Regarding the decrease in both commercial and recreational landings from the 2021 peak to lower levels in 2022-2024, driven largely by the Florida fisheries, Florida noted that areas off central east Florida are increasingly closed to vessels by the U.S. Coast Guard to create safety zones associated with space launches. This has prevented fishermen from accessing areas where they would traditionally fish for Spanish mackerel. The establishment of these temporary safety zones has contributed to a decline in Spanish mackerel landings and fishing effort. In addition to this issue, feedback from Florida stakeholders during the SAFMC Port Meetings conducted in 2024 noted concerns about shark depredation, water quality, weather conditions in federal waters, fish shifting northward, and changing effort dynamics (e.g., willingness to travel far distances to find fish) impacting Florida's Spanish mackerel fisheries.

IV. Status of Assessment Advice

In 2012, Spanish mackerel was assessed and peer reviewed through the SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR). The input data (through 2011) were applied to two assessment models, with the primary model being a statistical catch at age model called the Beaufort Assessment Model (BAM); while a secondary surplus-production model (ASPIC) provided a comparison of model results. The Review Panel concluded that the statistical catch at age model was the most appropriate model to characterize the stock status for management purposes. The most recent assessment, SEDAR 78, used the same model configuration with some updates, including an updated growth model, shortened time series to a new start date, and alternative pooling of commercial age compositions due to low sample sizes.

After SEDAR 78 was complete, it was reviewed by the SAFMC's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The SSC noted some concerns about the assessment, including some missing age compositions, data gaps due to small sample sizes, uncertainty around the spike in 2020 recreational data, and need for updated natural mortality and steepness estimates. The SSC concluded that the SEDAR 78 base model is adequate for determining stock status but did not support the stock projections. The SSC noted the projections are not sufficiently robust and influenced greatly by uncertain data in terminal year (2020), and the indications of a declining stock are not consistent with observations or recent data.

The next Spanish mackerel assessment has been moved to occur sooner in the SEDAR schedule with expected completion in 2027. It is anticipated that the next assessment will use the revised MRIP FES time series.

V. Status of Research and Monitoring

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) continues to monitor length and weight at age and size frequencies, fishing mortality, and migration; collect age data and catch per unit effort by area, season, fishery, and gear; monitor shrimp trawl bycatch; investigate methods to predict year class strength; calculate estimates of

recruitment, and develop conservation gear to reduce bycatch. NMFS is also collecting discard data through a bycatch logbook in the mackerel and snapper-grouper fisheries. The Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Development Foundation and several states (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida) have evaluated finfish bycatch in the southeastern shrimp trawl fishery, including bycatch of Spanish mackerel. The South Atlantic component of the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) collects Spanish mackerel data in its Coastal Trawl Survey from Cape Hatteras to Cape Canaveral. Additionally, the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) began regular spring and fall surveys between Martha's Vineyard and Cape Hatteras in the fall of 2007.[1]

While there are no fishery-dependent or fishery-independent monitoring requirements in the Interstate FMP, some states collect information on Spanish mackerel through various state fishery-dependent programs and fishery-independent surveys (briefly summarized below based on information provided in state compliance reports).

Florida: The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWC-FWRI) conducts regular sampling in estuarine, bay, and coastal systems of Florida's Atlantic coast, including monthly sampling of young-of-year and post-young-of-year fish collected by center-bag-haul seines. The proportion of positive sets was used as a simple index of abundance of young-of-the-year (0 – 250 mm standard length) and post-young-of-the-year (>250 mm standard length). Very few Spanish Mackerel young-of-the-year were captured during 1997 – 2023 and therefore standardized catch rates could not be produced. An index on post young-of-the-year Spanish Mackerel, however, could be produced. This index has been variable throughout the timeseries with a recent decreasing trend from 2019 to 2022, although index values increased in 2024.

Florida also highlighted their fishery-dependent monitoring of Spanish mackerel through the Florida Marine Fisheries Information System ('Trip Ticket') program which collects trip-specific records.

Georgia: Some fishery-independent surveys are conducted in areas where Spanish mackerel could be encountered as bycatch, including the Ecological Monitoring Trawl Survey (EMTS) and the Marine Sportfish Population Health Survey (MSPHS). The EMTS monitors fish and invertebrates in Georgia estuaries and offshore states waters using a 40-foot flat otter trawl. Data collected include abundance, size composition, reproductive status, and temporal and spatial distributions of various marine species. In 2023, zero Spanish mackerel were captured. In 2024, the EMTS was not performed in the beginning of the year due to a catastrophic survey vessel mechanical issue. All values presented for 2024 are based on samples collected from April 2024 through December 2024. In 2024, 318 tows were conducted totaling 78.7 hours of tow time. A total of five Spanish Mackerel were
captured with a mean fork length (FL) of 196.0 mm.

[1] Many states and regional surveys experienced an interruption in sampling efforts in both recreational and commercial fishery surveys during the 2020 calendar year.

The MSPHS samples three Georgia estuaries on a seasonal basis using gillnets and trammel nets. In 2023, one Spanish mackerel was captured via gill net. In 2024 for gillnets, 216 net sets were conducted, and six Spanish Mackerel were captured. Fish ranged from 131.0 mm FL to 399.0 mm FL with an average size of 313.7 mm FL. In 2024 for trammel nets, 150 net sets were conducted, and no Spanish Mackerel were captured.

Georgia also highlighted two fishery-dependent projects, the Marine Sportfish Carcass Recovery Project, and the Cooperative Angler Tagging Project, but neither encountered Spanish Mackerel during 2024.

South Carolina: SCDNR operates the Coastal Trawl Survey (CTS) for SEAMAP, sampling nearshore waters between Cape Hatteras, NC and Cape Canaveral, FL during spring, summer, and fall. Spanish Mackerel have been a priority species of the CTS since 1989 with abundance, biomass and length-frequency data recorded. Beginning in 2011, life history samples have been obtained from a subsample of the specimens caught, for aging and the assessment of sex and reproductive stage. The CTS primarily captures individuals that have not yet reached the legal-size limit. Consequently, these data have the potential to serve as a juvenile index for fisheries projections, even though variability tends to be high. Although nominal abundance remained below the Survey's time series mean, both nominal and zero-inflated negative binomial (ZINB) standardized abundance showed a distinct upturn in 2024, following at least two years of decline.

South Carolina also highlighted its state-specific mandatory trip reporting system (logbook program) for licensed charter boat operators. These data indicate that the number of charter trips targeting Spanish mackerel, which has generally been increasing, may have peaked in 2021 and has experienced slight decline the last two years. Also, as trips targeting Spanish Mackerel generally account for less than 10% of total trips, Spanish Mackerel do not appear to be the primary target of the charter fishery. Data for total estimated number of fish caught show substantial variability from year to year. Live releases account for an average of about 19% of all Spanish Mackerel caught over the last 20 years. Discards reported as dead, however, are a very small portion of total catch, accounting for only 1.2% on average over the last 20 years.

North Carolina: Spanish mackerel are caught in the NCDMF statewide Independent Gill Net Survey (Program 915) and Pamlico Sound Trawl Survey (Program 195). These surveys utilize a stratified random sampling scheme designed to characterize the size and age distribution for key estuarine species in Pamlico Sound, Pamlico, Pungo, Neuse, Cape Fear, and New rivers. The overall relative abundance of Spanish mackerel in these programs is extremely low and therefore lacks the desired precision and confidence needed for the data to be used for management and stock assessment purposes.

Virginia: Virginia does not conduct any targeted fishery independent monitoring for Spanish mackerel. However, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science has several surveys (NEAMAP,

CHESMAP, and Juvenile Fish and Crab Trawl Survey) that observe Spanish mackerel, but the occurrence is rare and total numbers relatively small.

The VMRC Biological Sampling Program collects biological data from Virginia's commercial fisheries. In 2023, staff sampled 1,059 Spanish mackerel for length, 1,058 for weight, determined sex of 350 fish, and collected otoliths of 276 fish. Lengths ranged from 13 through 29 inches total length, with an average of 18.1 inches total length. Even though the minimum size limit for Spanish mackerel is 14 inches total length, fish less than 14 inches were observed and accordingly collected by VMRC staff. Ages ranged from 0 to 8 years old, with an average of 1.92.

In 2024, staff sampled 1,391 Spanish mackerel for length, 1,389 for weight, determined sex of 370 fish, and collected otoliths of 296 fish. Lengths ranged from 13 through 31 inches total length, with an average of 18.6 inches total length. Even though the minimum size limit for Spanish mackerel is 14 inches total length, fish less than 14 inches were observed and accordingly collected by VMRC staff. Ages ranged from 0 to 8 years old, with an average of 1.90.

Virginia also highlighted the VMRC Marine Sportfish Collection Project established in 2007. The project allows anglers to donate carcasses by dropping them off in freezers at high-traffic recreational fishing areas. Fish are processed for length, age, and sex. In 2023, VMRC staff collected 7 Spanish mackerel carcasses, collecting length measurements on all 7 and ages on 4 carcasses. Lengths ranged from 12 through 22 inches total length, with an average of 16.9 inches total length. Ages ranged from 0 to 1, with an average of 0.25 years old.

In 2024, VMRC staff collected 7 Spanish mackerel carcasses, collecting length measurements on all 7 and ages on 5 carcasses. Lengths ranged from 15 through 24 inches total length, with an average of 19.1 inches total length. Ages ranged from 0 to 2, with an average of 1.4 years old.

Maryland: MDDNR does not have a specific monitoring program for Spanish mackerel; however, they typically are encountered in the onboard commercial pound net survey, which is conducted from late May through November. In 2023, 94 Spanish mackerel were measured from the onboard pound net survey with fork lengths ranging between 240 – 580 mm and a mean fork length of 399 mm. In 2024, 30 Spanish mackerel were measured from the onboard pound net survey with fork lengths ranging between 345 – 468 mm and a mean fork length of 400 mm.

The MDDNR Choptank River independent gill net survey also encountered Spanish mackerel in 2024. Two Spanish mackerel were encountered, with a fork length of 330 mm and 406 mm. Twenty-one have been caught in the annual survey, which began in 2013.

Delaware: Delaware conducts a 30-ft bottom trawl survey to monitor relative abundance of adult groundfish in the Delaware Bay. This survey has been conducted annually since 1990; prior surveys were conducted from 1966-1971 and 1979-1984. There were few occurrences of Spanish Mackerel over the time series with no fish collected in the 2023-2024 surveys.

Delaware also monitors juvenile fish abundance with its 16-ft bottom trawl survey, which has been conducted annually in the Delaware Bay since 1980. This survey was expanded in 1986 to include the Delaware's Inland Bays (Indian River and Rehoboth Bay) and further expanded in 1989 to include six stations in the Delaware River. There have been few occurrences of Spanish Mackerel in the juvenile survey over the time series. In 2023, 16 fish were collected with 15 of the those 16 fish samples caught in the month of August in the Delaware Inland Bays. No Spanish mackerel were collected in 2024.

Delaware also noted the commercial monthly logbook reports which have recorded confidential Spanish mackerel landings in Delaware in 2001, 2005, 2019, 2020, and 2024.

New Jersey: Fishery independent surveys in New Jersey rarely encounter Spanish Mackerel. The New Jersey Ocean Trawl Survey samples nearshore waters and only encountered more than a few fish in two years: 1989 with 321 fish and 2023 with 55 fish. The Delaware River Seine Survey targets striped bass young-of-year and occasionally encounters Spanish mackerels with a few individuals encountered from 2021-2023. The Delaware Bay Trawl Survey targets juvenile fish and encountered a few Spanish mackerel in 1992 and 2021. The Raritan-Sandy Hook Complex Inventory Survey is a multi-gear survey which started in 2022 sampling from March-October and encountered one Spanish mackerel in the gillnet in 2023.

Rhode Island: One Spanish mackerel were intercepted during trawl survey work in 2024 while none were intercepted by 2023 or 2024 seine surveys conducted by the RIDEM Division of Marine Fisheries and partners in state waters.

VI. Status of Management Measures

Omnibus Amendment (Interstate FMP)

In August 2011, the Management Board approved an amendment to the Spanish Mackerel FMP to address three issues: compliance measures, consistency with federal management in the exclusive economic zone, and alignment with Commission standards. Through the Omnibus Amendment, the following fisheries management measures are required for states within the management unit range:

Recreational Fishery

- 12" Fork Length (FL) or 14" Total Length (TL) minimum size limit
- 15 fish creel limit
- Must be landed with head and fins intact
- Calendar year season
- Prohibited gear: Drift gill nets prohibited south of Cape Lookout, NC
- Decrease in the recreational quota the following year via reduced bag limits if the Total Annual Catch Limit (ACL) is exceeded and stock is overfished.

Commercial Fishery

- Prohibited: purse seines; drift gill nets south of Cape Lookout, NC

- 12” FL or 14” TL minimum size limit
- March 1 – end of February season
- Trip limits (per vessel, per day)
  NY-GA: 3500 lbs.
  FL: 3500 lbs., 3/1-11/30;
  3500 lbs. Mon-Fri & 1500 lbs. Sat-Sun, 12/1 until 75% adjusted quota taken;
  1500 lbs., when 75% adjusted quota taken until 100% adjusted quotas taken;
  500 lbs. after 100% of adjusted quotas taken (the adjusted quota compensates for estimated catches of 500 lbs. per vessel per day to the end of the season)
- Commercial quotas decreased the following year if Total ACL is exceeded and stock is overfished

Differences between the Interstate and Federal FMPs are described in Appendix I. The differences are the commercial management zones, commercial trip limits and closures, allowable gears, recreational season, and recreational accountability measures. The Board intends to address differences between the FMPs in the next management action.

Changes to the federal FMP since 2011 are described in Appendix II.

Update from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC)

The SAFMC conducted a series of in-person and virtual port meetings for the king and Spanish mackerel fisheries from April 2024 through January 2025. The final report was presented to the SAFMC in March 2025. In June 2025, the SAFMC considered how to respond to recommendations made during port meetings as well as the most recent Atlantic Spanish mackerel stock assessment (SEDAR 78). The SAFMC decided to postpone work on addressing catch level recommendations from SEDAR 78 until the revised MRIP FES time series is available. The Council also requested staff work with the SEFSC to see if the next Atlantic Spanish mackerel stock assessment can occur sooner in the SEDAR schedule. As a result, the SEDAR schedule was modified to accommodate an Atlantic Spanish mackerel stock assessment in early 2027 incorporating the revised MRIP time series.

Additionally, the Council noted that NCDMF and FLFWC will continue to communicate and coordinate on the potential for commercial quota transfers for Atlantic Spanish mackerel between the Northern and Southern Zones.

VII. Implementation of FMP Compliance Requirements for 2023 and 2024

All states must implement the requirements specified in section 5 of the Omnibus Amendment. Based on annual state compliance reports, the PRT determined that all states in 2023 and 2024 implemented a management program consistent with the provisions of the Interstate FMP except for one inconsistency that has since been addressed:

- The Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC) had not implemented the required daily commercial trip limit of 3,500 pounds. After notification in summer 2025, PRFC addressed this at its next quarterly meeting and implemented the trip limit effective September 22, 2025.

De Minimis Requests

A state qualifies for *de minimis* status if its previous three-year average combined commercial and recreational landings is less than 1% of the previous three-year average coastwide combined commercial and recreational landings. Those states that qualify for *de minimis* are not required to implement any monitoring requirements (note: there are no monitoring requirements for Spanish mackerel in the FMP). The states of Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, and Georgia request *de minimis* status. All four states meet the requirements for *de minimis*.

Regulation Changes

Some states voluntarily reduced commercial trip limits in state waters via proclamation or public notice when federal waters closed for the Northern Commercial Zone in 2023 and 2024 (Table 1).

VIII. Recommendations of the Plan Review Team

The PRT has the following recommendations:

- Better understand the dynamics across regions to inform future management. The Board may need to consider extending management measures further into the New England region (as far north as Massachusetts) if consistent catches and anecdotal sightings of Spanish mackerel continue to increase in frequency. Stock structure should also be investigated to determine whether more northerly fish are of the same stock as fish further south, and consider the impact of the potential regions in future stock assessments. The PRT recommends compiling information on current/past tagging and genetic studies for Spanish mackerel to inform this topic.

- Better understand the life history components for Spanish mackerel, particularly from fishery independent surveys. Length, sex, age, and CPUE data are needed for improved stock assessment accuracy as well as evaluation of weight and especially length at age of Spanish mackerel. Virginia and South Carolina noted their Spanish mackerel data (thousands of age and length samples) as available data sources.

- Investigate discard mortality in both the commercial and recreational fisheries. Specific information should include an estimate of total amount caught and distribution of catch by area, season, and type of gear. Virginia has noted its state observers are monitoring the new commercial gill net permits and noted few discards in those nets.

- Better understand how environmental drivers are affecting the distribution of Spanish mackerel (both inshore vs. offshore and north vs. south). The takeaway from recent SAFMC port meetings was that the fishery is reliable in North Carolina and the Mid-Atlantic, but farther south, especially Florida, where and when the Spanish mackerel are showing up has changed substantially in recent years.

- Better understand how social and economic drivers as well as regulatory systems are affecting overall effort and participation in the commercial and recreational Spanish mackerel fisheries.

- Continue coordination between ASMFC and the SAFMC on future management action to address differences between the Interstate and Federal FMPs (see Appendix I). These differences will be particularly important to address when catch levels are updated in the next federal management action.

For reference, the PRT reminds the Board that the Spanish Mackerel Technical Committee compiled a white paper in 2024 summarizing general characteristics and state/regional differences in Spanish mackerel fisheries. Additionally, research recommendations from the most recent stock assessment may be found here (pdf 84-85).

IX. References

SEDAR (SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review). 2012. SEDAR 28- South Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Stock Assessment Report. SEDAR, North Charleston SC. 438 pp. available online at: https://sedarweb.org/assessments/sedar-28/

SEDAR. 2022. SEDAR 78 South Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Stock Assessment Report. SEDAR, North Charleston SC. 177 pp. available online at: https://sedarweb.org/assessments/sedar-78/

X. Figures

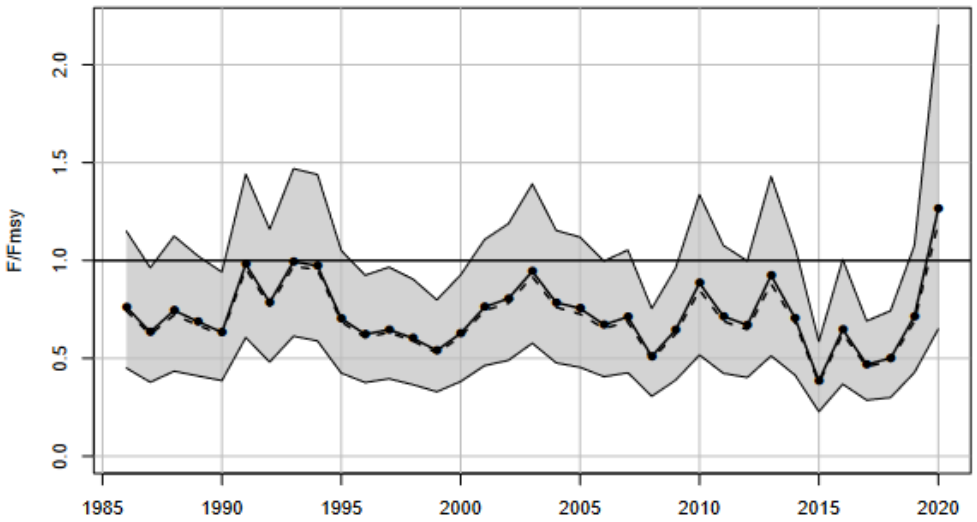


Figure 1. Estimated time series of Atlantic group Spanish mackerel fishing mortality rate (F) relative to F_{MSY} benchmark. Solid line indicates estimates from base run of the Beaufort Assessment Model; dashed lines indicate the median of the Monte Carlo Bootstrap analysis trials; grey error bands indicate 5th and 95th percentiles of the Monte Carlo Bootstrap analysis trials (SEDAR, 2022).

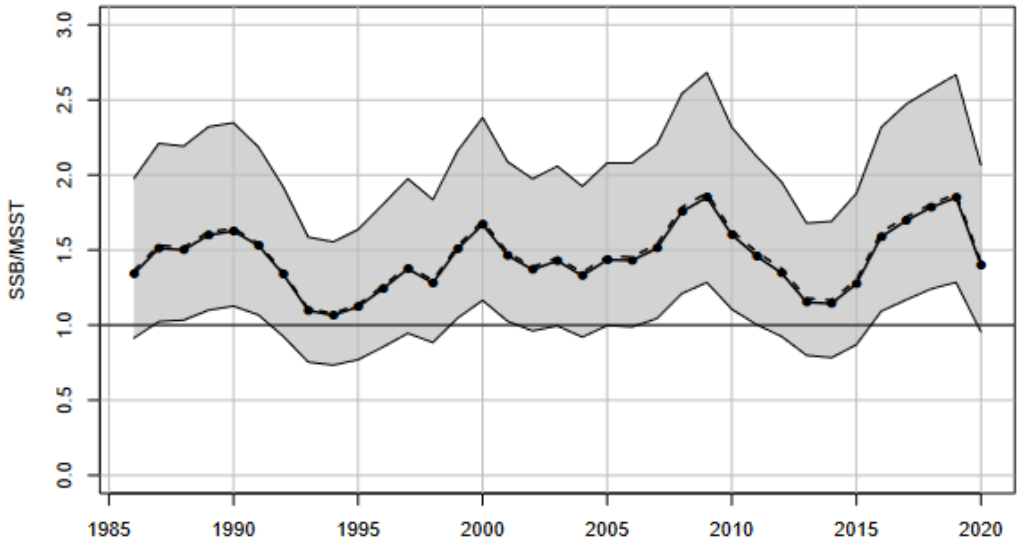


Figure 2. Estimated time series of Atlantic group Spanish mackerel spawning stock biomass (SSB) relative to MSY benchmark. Solid line indicates estimates from base run of the Beaufort Assessment Model; dashed lines indicate the median of the Monte Carlo Bootstrap analysis trials; grey error bands indicate 5th and 95th percentiles of the Monte Carlo Bootstrap analysis trials (SEDAR, 2022).

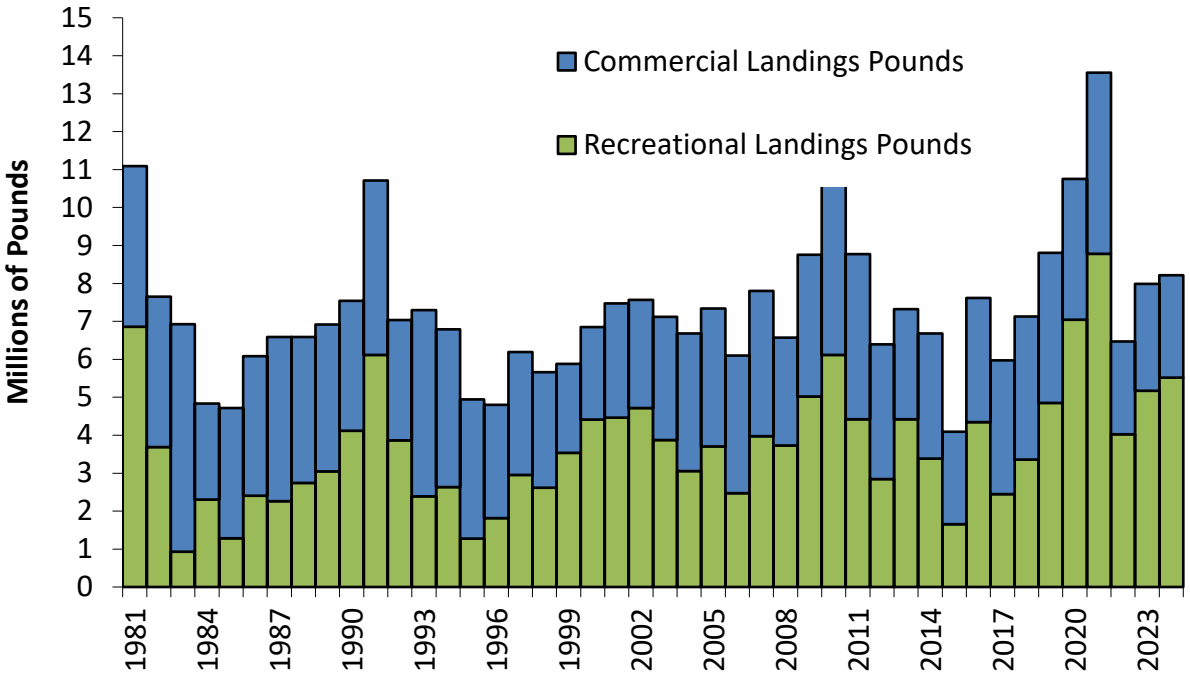


Figure 3. Commercial and recreational harvest (FES) (pounds) of Spanish mackerel, 1981-2024. Source: State compliance reports, ACCSP, MRIP query January 2026.

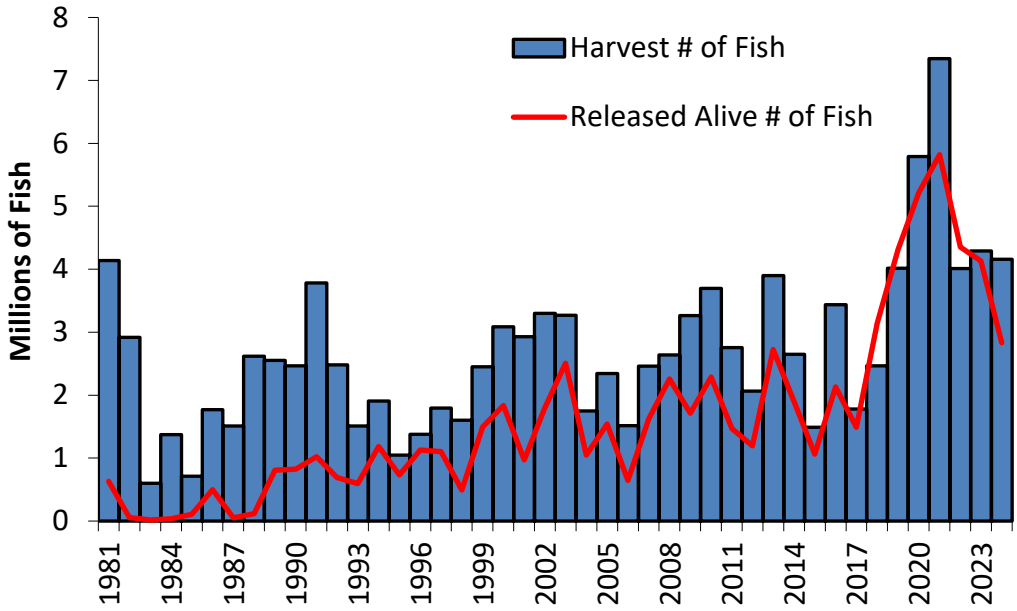


Figure 4. Recreational harvest and releases (numbers of fish) of Spanish mackerel, 1981-2024. Source: MRIP query January 2026.

XI. Tables

Table 1. Summary of state regulations for Spanish mackerel in 2023 and 2024.
Notes: A commercial license is required to sell Spanish mackerel in all states; other general gear restrictions apply to the harvest of Spanish mackerel. Purse seines, and drift gill nets south of Cape Lookout, NC are prohibited.

State	Recreational	Commercial
RI	14" TL, 15 fish	14" TL. 3,500 lb. trip limit.
NY	14" TL, 15 fish	14" TL. 3,500 lb. trip limit.
NJ	14" TL, 10 fish	14" TL. 3,500 lb. trip limit.
DE	14" TL, 15 fish	14" TL. 3,500 lb. trip limit.
MD	14" TL, 15 fish	14" TL. 3,500 lb. trip limit. Public notice 9/25/2023 and 8/2024: 500-lb trip limit when harvest in federal waters closed.
PRFC	14" TL, 15 fish	14" TL. 3,500 lb. trip limit as of 9/22/2025. Closure if/when both MD and VA fisheries close.
VA	14" TL, 15 fish	12” or 14" TL. 3,500 lb. trip limit. 500 lb. trip limit if/when harvest in federal waters closed.
NC	12" FL, 15 fish	12" FL; 3,500 lb. trip limit for combined Spanish and king mackerel landings. Proclamation issued 9/25/2023 and 7/28/2024: 500-lb trip limit when harvest in federal waters closed.
SC	12" FL, 15 fish	12" FL. 3500 lbs. until 75% of adjusted Atlantic Southern Zone quota taken, then 1500 lbs. until 100% of adjusted quota is taken, then 500 lbs. until the end of year or commercial quota is met. If quota is met, then commercial sector is closed to harvest. Requires open access permit for Spanish mackerel.
GA	12" FL, 15 fish	12" FL. 3500 lbs. until 75% of adjusted Atlantic Southern Zone quota taken, then 1500 lbs. until 100% of adjusted quota is taken, then 500 lbs. until the end of year or commercial quota is met. If quota is met, then commercial sector is closed to harvest.
FL	12" FL, 15 fish. Cast nets less than 14’ and beach or haul seines within 2” stretched mesh allowed	12" FL or 14” TL. Trip limits: April 1 until Nov. 30 – 3500 lb.; Dec. 1 until 75% of adjusted quota reached – 3500 lb. Monday – Friday & 1500 lb. Saturday – Sunday; >75% adjusted quota until quota filled – 1500 lb.; > 100% of adjusted quota – 500 lb. Restricted Species Endorsement Required Allowed gear: beach or haul seine, cast net, hook and line, or spearing.

Table 2. Commercial landings (pounds, calendar year) of Spanish mackerel by state, 2015-2024. (Source: Annual state compliance reports for 2024; ACCSP for 2023 and earlier. Confidential values are shown as "C". Coastwide totals and 'Other' totals adhere to the ACCSP rule of 3, i.e., totals are reflective of the true total if 0 or at least 3 states' data are confidential in a given year. Otherwise, they are sums of non-confidential data.)

Year	Other*	RI	NY	NJ	DE	MD	PRFC
2015		C	1,357	2,746		2,222	
2016		C	813	1,997	C	16,205	548
2017	C	652	1,053	462		815	4,704
2018	C	951	1,283	950		3,071	420
2019	C	1,484	5,683	2,010	C	12,545	45,385
2020	C	602	3,023	C	C	6,728	10,092
2021	C	284	6,217	C	C	5,192	20,076
2022	C	C	6,182	1,903		6,368	11,066
2023	C		3,728	807	C	4,540	8,520
2024	C		2,583	C	C	3,213	1,455

Year	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL^	Total
2015	14,493	561,714	C		1,857,556	2,440,094
2016	32,779	601,623	C		2,619,848	3,273,989
2017	21,605	816,089	C		2,674,025	3,519,405
2018	23,212	796,890	C		2,943,419	3,770,196
2019	149,705	722,398	C	C	3,012,007	3,951,390
2020	63,697	1,033,526	C	C	2,588,404	3,707,975
2021	143,377	1,155,289	C		3,431,262	4,767,393
2022	221,269	926,035	C	C	1,275,808	2,448,800
2023	191,489	805,032			1,805,158	2,819,274
2024	342,106	841,478	C		1,502,751	2,697,871

*Other: states that do not have a declared interest in Spanish mackerel and do not sit on the Coastal Pelagics Board

^Atlantic coast landings only for Florida

Table 3. Recreational harvest (**numbers**, calendar year) of Spanish mackerel by state, 2015-2024. State values shown are the current estimates using information from the mail-based Fishing Effort Survey (FES). (Source: personal communication with NOAA Fisheries, Fisheries Statistics Division. January 2026).

Note: Past FMP Reviews showed state-by-state estimates from the CHTS and cannot be directly compared to the state-by-state totals below.

Year	Other*	RI	NY	NJ	DE	MD	VA
2015						15,837	14,950
2016					9	18,559	554,813
2017				8,107	28	9,687	20,000
2018				6,753	797	19,146	132,390
2019	335		21,031	8,787	1,396	109,007	587,683
2020	6,254	3,016	6,096	3,985	92	151,412	374,892
2021	622		3,143	34,323	129	152,829	344,235
2022		414	1,435	11,865	16,213	70,582	380,446
2023			3,573	45,690	18,420	63,833	498,878
2024	616		13,743	23,137	2,215	71,556	328,693

Year	NC	SC	GA	FL^	Total
2015	835,011	389,923	6,201	229,669	**1,491,591**
2016	918,352	306,235	22,637	1,618,529	**3,439,134**
2017	995,706	45,644	48,633	650,916	**1,778,721**
2018	1,012,889	289,250	49,764	956,741	**2,468,046**
2019	1,478,890	1,046,972	138,756	623,415	**4,016,272**
2020	1,286,131	861,349	72,308	3,025,466	**5,791,001**
2021	1,312,929	752,570	24,666	4,718,809	**7,344,255**
2022	1,898,755	1,060,999	12,583	555,443	**4,008,735**
2023	1,204,175	944,745	118,092	1,394,829	**4,292,235**
2024	1,954,067	582,137	16,476	1,167,061	**4,159,701**

*Other: states that do not have a declared interest in Spanish mackerel and do not sit on the Coastal Pelagics Board

^Atlantic coast landings only for Florida

Table 4. Recreational harvest (**pounds**, calendar year) of Spanish mackerel by state, 2015-2024. State values shown are the current estimates using information from the mail-based Fishing Effort Survey (FES). (Source: personal communication with NOAA Fisheries, Fisheries Statistics Division. January 2026).

Note: Past FMP Reviews showed state-by-state estimates from the CHTS and cannot be directly compared to the state-by-state totals below.

Year	Other*	RI	NY	NJ	DE	MD	VA
2015						40,290	13,777
2016					8	30,212	620,147
2017				9,405	43	20,646	30,590
2018				5,702	1,138	41,476	207,551
2019	591		30,177	17,558	1,300	181,994	718,353
2020	10,821	3,991	11,756	4,123	95	223,090	441,654
2021	1,041		3,227	38,116	160	251,273	399,106
2022		782	1,978	17,193	19,301	150,029	489,083
2023			2,985	56,701	23,909	83,661	497,525
2024	1,494		30,939	30,666	3,052	110,105	424,559

Year	NC	SC	GA	FL^	FES Total
2015	981,867	253,620	22,185	342,598	**1,654,337**
2016	907,400	192,865	39,915	2,552,216	**4,342,763**
2017	1,094,778	75,779	72,064	1,146,112	**2,449,417**
2018	1,156,702	513,271	74,910	1,354,426	**3,357,009**
2019	1,694,247	847,163	348,469	1,011,804	**4,851,656**
2020	1,843,314	556,882	232,439	3,714,856	**7,043,021**
2021	1,894,535	503,374	46,879	5,645,741	**8,783,452**
2022	1,841,527	773,139	39,885	689,100	**4,022,017**
2023	1,216,236	857,266	148,235	2,283,714	**5,170,232**
2024	2,710,335	523,163	29,282	1,649,858	**5,513,453**

*Other: states that do not have a declared interest in Spanish mackerel and do not sit on the Coastal Pelagics Board

^Atlantic coast landings only for Florida

Table 5. Recreational releases (**numbers**, calendar year) of Spanish mackerel by state, 2015-2024. State values shown are the current estimates using information from the mail-based Fishing Effort Survey (FES). (Source: personal communication with NOAA Fisheries, Fisheries Statistics Division. January 2026).

Note: Past FMP Reviews showed state-by-state estimates from the CHTS and cannot be directly compared to the state-by-state totals below.

Year	Other*	RI	NY	NJ	DE	MD	VA
2015						355	4,945
2016					1,038		111,284
2017				14,050		3,747	14,829
2018			11,859	14,372	2	2,166	168,549
2019	4,731		49,390	60,003	2,334	62,881	536,244
2020	40,572		5,395	79,458	1,367	63,467	278,173
2021	3,137	450	2,155	13,309	206	87,479	178,237
2022	1,259	503	1,458	18,224		2,894	188,201
2023	3,644	2,000	11,370	52,803	351	30,105	297,903
2024		1,116	4,337	3,992	2,215	241	140,108

Year	NC	SC	GA	FL^	FES Total
2015	514,714	321,930	4,185	219,190	**1,065,319**
2016	546,950	333,635	137	1,136,663	**2,130,960**
2017	688,062	300,244	17,408	453,911	**1,492,251**
2018	1,019,418	322,330	18,149	1,584,579	**3,141,424**
2019	1,340,366	1,588,754	14,943	652,727	**4,312,373**
2020	1,267,210	1,060,185	15,301	2,403,133	**5,214,261**
2021	1,294,525	647,701	13,733	3,579,828	**5,820,760**
2022	2,268,283	1,401,659	38,885	432,592	**4,353,958**
2023	1,293,628	1,487,206	61,330	890,686	**4,131,026**
2024	1,528,319	786,645	18,010	345,641	**2,830,624**

*Other: states that do not have a declared interest in Spanish mackerel and do not sit on the Coastal Pelagics Board

^Atlantic coast landings only for Florida

Appendix I. Differences Between the Interstate FMP and Federal FMP for Spanish Mackerel

In February 2020, the former South Atlantic Management Board, which is now split into the Coastal Pelagics Management Board and Sciaenids Management Board, discussed differences between the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Spanish mackerel and the federal Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMP for Spanish mackerel. The last update to the Interstate FMP was the Omnibus Amendment for Spanish Mackerel, Spot, and Spotted Sea Trout (2011) and its Addendum I for Spanish Mackerel (2013).

Differences between the Interstate and Federal FMPs exist in terms of commercial management zones, commercial trip limits and closures, allowable gears, recreational season, and recreational accountability measures. Board action to consider addressing these differences was postponed until completion of the 2022 stock assessment. The differences between the Interstate and Federal FMPs are outlined below.

Definition of Commercial Management Zones

The Interstate FMP defines the Northern Zone as New York through Georgia, and the Southern Zone as the east coast of Florida. The Federal FMP defines the Northern Zone as New York through North Carolina, and the Southern Zone as South Carolina through Florida (through the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line). For the Interstate FMP, Rhode Island joined the interstate management unit in 2021.

Commercial Trip Limits and Closures

For their respective Northern Zones, both the Interstate and Federal FMPs set a 3,500-pound commercial trip limit. For the interstate Southern Zone, the trip limit starts at 3,500 pounds and is reduced throughout the season depending on the date and how much of the quota is met. For the federal Southern Zone, the trip limit also starts at 3,500 pounds and is reduced depending on how much of the quota is met.

In federal waters, each management zone closes when that federal zone's total quota is met. Under the Interstate FMP, states are not required to close state waters when federal waters close. In recent years, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina have implemented a reduced 500-pound trip limit in state waters when the Northern Zone federal waters closed.

The commercial trip limits and management zones are summarized in the following table.

Commercial Management Zones and Trip Limits	
Interstate FMP	**Federal FMP**
Northern Zone New York to Georgia (RI joined in 2021) – 3,500-pound trip limit – Not required to close when federal waters close. *Note: In recent years, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina have implemented a 500-lb trip limit in state waters when the Northern Zone federal waters closed.*	*Northern Zone* New York to North Carolina – 3,500-pound trip limit – Closed when Northern Zone total quota is met.
Southern Zone Florida (east coast) – 3,500-pound trip limit: 3/1-11/30; – 3,500 limit Mon-Fri & 1,500 limit Sat-Sun: 12/1 until 75% adjusted quota taken; – 1,500 limit until 100% adjusted quota taken; – 500 limit after 100% adj. quota taken; – Not required to close when federal waters close.	*Southern Zone* South Carolina to Florida (east coast) – 3,500-pound trip limit until 75% of the Southern Zone adjusted quota is met; – 1,500 limit until 100% of the Southern Zone adjusted quota is met; – 500 limit after 100% of the Southern Zone adjusted quota is met; – Closed when the Southern Zone total quota met.

Allowable Gears

The Interstate FMP lists prohibited gears for each sector. For the commercial sector, purse seines, and drift gill nets south of Cape Lookout, NC are prohibited. For the recreational sector, drift gill nets south of Cape Lookout, NC are prohibited. The Federal FMP lists allowable gears: only automatic reel, bandit gear, handline, rod and reel, cast net, run-around gillnet, and stab net allowed.

Recreational Season

The Interstate FMP specifies a calendar year recreational season, while the Federal FMP's recreational fishing year is March 1 through the end of February.

Recreational Accountability Measures

Under the Interstate FMP, if the total annual catch limit (ACL) is exceeded and the stock is overfished, the recreational quotas are decreased via reduced bag limits the following year. Under the Federal FMP, if the total ACL is exceeded, bag limits are reduced the following year to achieve the annual catch target (ACT) but not to exceed the ACL. If the stock is overfished and the ACL is exceeded, there is a payback, reducing the ACT by the overage amount the following year.

Appendix II. Changes to the Spanish Mackerel Federal FMP Since 2011

Amendment 18 (Federal)

In August 2011, the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, Fishery Management Councils approved Amendment 18 to the joint FMP for Coastal Migratory Pelagics. The primary action under consideration established Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) and Accountability Measures (AMs) for cobia, king mackerel, and Spanish mackerel. The amendment designates ACLs and Annual Catch Targets (ACTs) for each of the two migratory groups of Spanish mackerel (Atlantic and Gulf). For the Atlantic migratory group, the commercial sector ACL is set equivalent to the commercial sector quota of 3.13 million pounds. The AM for the commercial sector is that the commercial sector will close when the commercial quota is reached or projected to be reached. In addition, current trip limit adjustments will remain in place. When the commercial sector closes, harvest and possession of Spanish mackerel would be prohibited for persons aboard a vessel for which a commercial permit for Spanish mackerel has been issued.

For the recreational sector, the ACT is set at 2.32 million pounds, while the ACL is set at 2.56 million pounds. Regarding the AM, if the stock ACL is exceeded in any year, the bag limit will be reduced the next fishing year by the amount necessary to ensure recreational landings achieve the recreational ACT, but do not exceed the recreational ACL in the following fishing year. A payback will be assessed if the Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel is determined to be overfished and the stock ACL is exceeded. The payback will include a reduction in the sector ACT for the following year by the amount of the overage by that sector in the prior fishing year.

Amendment 20A (Federal)

Effective July 2014, this Amendment addresses the sale of bag limit caught Spanish mackerel. The amendment arose from concerns that sales of fish caught under the recreational bag limit are counted toward commercial quotas, and thus contribute to the early closure of the commercial sector. In addition, potential double counting of these fish could be causing erroneous landings estimates. In response, the Amendment prohibits bag limit sales with the exception of recreationally caught fish from state permitted tournaments in the South Atlantic region. This amendment also included an action to remove income requirements for federal CMP permits.

South Atlantic CMP Framework Action (Federal)

Effective December 2014, this action allows Spanish mackerel, harvested with gillnet gear in the South Atlantic EEZ off Florida (north of the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line) that is in excess of the trip limit, to be transferred to another federally permitted vessel that has not yet harvested the trip limit. The Framework stipulates that the transfer can only occur if: 1) allowable gillnet gear was used to harvest Spanish mackerel; 2) the transfer takes place in federal waters between vessels with valid commercial permits; 3) the receiving vessel does not have more than 3 gillnets aboard after the transfer; 4) all fish remain entangled in the meshes of the net until the transfer; 5) the quantity of the fish transferred does not exceed the daily trip limit; and 6) there is only one transfer per vessel per day.

CMP Framework Amendment 1 (Federal)
This Framework Amendment, effective December 2014, increases the Atlantic Spanish mackerel ACL to 6.063 million pounds. The modification to the ACL followed the 2013 stock assessment which concluded that the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The Amendment divides the ACL between the commercial sector (3.33 million pounds) and the recreational sector (2.727 million pounds).

Amendment 20B (Federal)
Effective March 2015, this Amendment separates commercial quotas of Atlantic Spanish mackerel between a Northern zone (north of NC/SC line) and a Southern zone (South of NC/SC line). The Amendment arose from concerns that the commercial quota could be filled by fishermen in one state before fish are available to fishermen in another state. In order to prevent this from happening, a zone is closed when its respective quota is met. Quota for each zone was based on landings from 2002/2003-2011/2012.

CMP Framework Amendment 2 (Federal)
Implemented July 2015, this Amendment modifies the commercial trip limit system in the Southern zone. The rule establishes a trip limit of 3,500 pounds for Spanish mackerel in Federal waters offshore of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. When 75% of the adjusted southern zone commercial quota is caught, the commercial trip limit is reduced to 1,500 lbs. When 100% of the adjusted southern zone commercial quota is met, the commercial trip limit is further reduced to 500 lbs. This limit remains until the end of the year or the total Southern zone commercial quota is met.

CMP Framework Amendment 5 (Federal)
Implemented August 2017, this Framework Amendment allows commercially permitted vessels to operate as private recreational vessels when the commercial season is closed for Spanish or king mackerel.

Amendment 34 (Federal)
Implemented in 2023, Amendment 34 allows cut-off (damaged by natural predation) Atlantic Spanish mackerel caught under the recreational bag limit, which comply with the minimum size limits, to be possessed, and offloaded ashore.

Framework Amendment 13 (Federal) – *Development of this action is currently paused*.
Initiated in 2023, Framework Amendment 13 responds to the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 78) and was intended to update catch levels based on the SSC recommendations and address recreational accountability measures. This action would provide recreational catch levels in MRIP FES units. In December 2023, this action was paused until the completion of the 2024 port meetings.

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
MACKEREL COBIA COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Cape Canaveral, Florida
June 10, 2025

The Committee approved the minutes from the March 2025 meeting and the agenda.

Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel Report
The Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel met in Charleston, South Carolina, on March 31 and April 1, 2025. Advisory Panel Chair, Thomas Newman, provided a summary of meeting discussions and recommendations.

Gulf Council CMP Stakeholder Engagement Effort
The Gulf Council held three public virtual seminars in the fall of 2024 which specifically addressed issues related to Spanish mackerel, king mackerel, and cobia. The engagement questions asked during the virtual seminars were also asked during the February 2024 CMP and December 2024 Reef Fish advisory panel meetings. The purpose of these engagement sessions was to gather feedback from industry stakeholders on the health and status of CMP stocks as a complementary effort to the South Atlantic Council's Mackerel Port Meetings. Emily Muehlstein, Gulf Council staff, provided a summary of the stakeholder feedback collected.

Mackerel Port Meetings Next Steps
In 2024, at the urging of their Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel, the Council hosted a series of 16 in-person and six virtual port meetings along the Atlantic coast. Port meetings attendees discussed their perspectives with other fishery participants and local Council members. In March 2025, Council staff reviewed the draft report and high-level themes from this effort. The Council requested detailed information from port meetings on a suite of management options to be brought to the June 2025 meeting. Council staff presented this information in addition to a refresher on the results of SEDAR 78 (Atlantic Spanish mackerel).

The Committee provided the following directions for staff:

DIRECTION TO STAFF: POSTPONE WORK ON FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT 13 UNTIL THE RESULTS OF THE FES PILOT STUDY ARE RECEIVED AND WORK WITH THE SEFSC TO SEE IF THE NEXT ATLANTIC SPANISH MACKEREL ASSESSMENT CAN OCCUR SOONER IN THE SEDAR SCHEDULE.

DIRECTION TO STAFF: CONSIDER RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PORT MEETINGS IN CONJUNCTION WITH AN UPDATED ATLANTIC SPANISH MACKEREL STOCK ASSESSMENT.

DIRECTION TO STAFF: BEGIN TO LOOK AT THE POTENTIAL PORT MEETING RESPONSE ACTIONS AS REGULATORY VS DEREGULATORY, BRING THIS BACK TO THE COMMITTEE ONCE THE FES PILOT STUDY IS AVAILABLE.

Additionally, it was noted that North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries and Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission will continue to communicate and better coordinate on the potential for yearly commercial quota transfers for Atlantic Spanish mackerel between the Northern Zone and Southern Zone.

Other Business

The Committee acknowledged that the Mackerel Cobia AP requested to discuss conservation and management needs for Atlantic bonito. However, the Committee felt that the South Atlantic Council may not be the ideal management body for Atlantic bonito. Additionally, the Committee noted that the Council has limited resources and is currently responding to several recent executive orders aimed at reducing burdens on domestic fishing and increasing production.

Note: Council staff drafts the timing and task motion based on Committee action. If points require clarification, they will be added to the draft motion. The Committee should review this wording carefully to be sure it accurately reflects their intent prior to making the motion.

Timing and Task(s)

MOTION 1: ADOPT THE FOLLOWING TIMING AND TASKS:

1. Work with the SEFSC to see if the next Atlantic Spanish mackerel assessment can occur sooner than currently proposed in the SEDAR schedule.
2. Look at the potential port meeting response actions to determine if they are regulatory vs. deregulatory. Bring this information to the Mackerel Committee once the FES pilot study is available.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

1050 N. Highland Street • Suite 200A-N • Arlington, VA 22201
703.842.0740 • asmfc.org

MEMORANDUM

January 20, 2026

To: **Coastal Pelagics & Sciaenids Management Boards**

From: **Tina Berger, Director of Communications**

RE: **Advisory Panel Nomination**

Please find attached a new nomination to the South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel – Robert Hale, a recreational angler from Georgia. He primarily targets Spanish mackerel, black drum, spotted seatrout, and red drum. Please review this nomination for action at the next Board meeting.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (703) 842-0749 or tberger@asmfc.org.

Enc.

cc: Coastal Pelagics Board, Tracey Bauer, Emilie Franke

SOUTH ATLANTIC SPECIES ADVISORY PANEL

Bolded names await approval by the Coastal Pelagics or Sciaenids Management Boards
Bolded and italicized name denotes Advisory Panel Chair January 20, 2026

Delaware
Daniel T. Dugan (rec)
20 South Woodward Avenue
Wilmington, DE 19805
Phone: (302)636-9300
dtdugan@verizon.net
Appt. Confirmed 11/1/07
Appt Reconfirmed 10/18/16

New Jersey
Jeffrey Reichle (comm.)
PO Box 830
Cape May, NJ 08204
Phone: (day): (609)884-7600
Phone (eve): (609)884-0661
FAX: (609)884-0664
jreichle@lundsfish.com
Appt. Confirmed 11/1/07

Chris McCurdy (for-hire)
10 Birch Drive
Swainton, NJ 08210
Phone (day): (609)463-6760
Phone (cell): (609)374-4604
capt.curd@verizon.net
Appt. Confirmed 11/1/07
Expertise: Red drum, black drum, Atlantic croaker

Maryland
Vacancy (rec & comm)

Virginia
Thomas J. Powers (rec)
311 Hunts Neck Road
Poquoson, VA 23662
Phone: 757-269-7660
powers@jlab.org
Appt. Confirmed 11/1/07
Expertise: Atlantic croaker

Chair, Craig Freeman (rec/for-hire/comm)
118 Messick Road
Poquoson, VA 23662
Phone: (757)871-9246
Gradingscalessportfishing@gmail.com
Expertise: Cobia
Appt. Confirmed 8/9/18

North Carolina
Glenn Skinner (commercial gillnetter)
296 Cyprus Pollard Road
Newport, NC 28570
Phone: 252.646.7742
glennskinner@ncfish.org
Expertise: spot, spotted seatrout, Spanish mackerel
Appt. Confirmed 10/25/18

Mary Ellon Ballance (commercial pound net)
PO Box 756
Hatteras, NC 27943
Phone: 252.305.2685
maryellon@me.com
Expertise: black drum, red drum, spotted seatrout, Spanish mackerel
Appt. Confirmed 5/2/22

Charles Bernard (Bernie) McCants, Jr (rec)
2325 Windy Woods Dr

Raleigh, NC 27607
Phone (day): 919.602.4516
Phone (evening): 919.602.4516
FAX: 919.668.7064
bernie.mccants@duke.edu
Appt Confirmed 8/9/12
Expertise: Red drum, black drum

SOUTH ATLANTIC SPECIES ADVISORY PANEL

Bolded names await approval by the Coastal Pelagics or Sciaenids Management Boards
Bolded and italicized name denotes Advisory Panel Chair January 20, 2026

Aaron Kelly (for-hire)
112 Jimmy Court
Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948
Phone (day): 252.202.6046
Phone (eve): 252.441.6575
info@rocksolidfishing.com
Expertise: Cobia
Appt Confirmed 10/25/16

South Carolina
Glenn Ulrich (rec)
684 Ritter Drive
Charleston, SC 29412
843.793.8712
ulrichg@bellsouth.net
Expertise: Mixed species
Appt Confirmed 10/25/16

Vacancy (rec)

Georgia
Robert Hale (rec)
125 Peter's Quay
Savannah, GA 31410
912.224.8313
satdesk@yahoo.com
Expertise: Mixed species

Florida
James R. Stockton, Jr. (guideboat)
P.O. Box 1069
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32004
Phone: (904)285-4884
Appt. Confirmed 11/1/07
Expertise: Red drum

William R. Bird, Jr. (rec)
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Orlando, FL 32802
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Phone (eve): (407) 257-7480
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bill.bird@lddkr.com and wbird2@cfl.rr.com
Appt. Confirmed 11/1/07
Expertise: Red drum and black drum

Tim Adams (Sp. Mackerel comm.)
426 S.W. Maple St.
Sebastian, FL 32958
Phone (eve): (772) 589-9846
Phone (cell): (772)473-6580
Appt. Confirmed 11/1/07
Expertise: Spanish Mackerel

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

Advisory Panel Nomination Form

This form is designed to help nominate Advisors to the Commission's Species Advisory Panels. The information on the returned form will be provided to the Commission's relevant species management board or section. Please answer the questions in the categories (All Nominees, Commercial Fisherman, Charter/Headboat Captain, Recreational Fisherman, Dealer/Processor, or Other Interested Parties) that pertain to the nominee's experience. If the nominee fits into more than one category, answer the questions for all categories that fit the situation. **Also, please fill in the sections which pertain to All Nominees (pages 1 and 2). In addition, nominee signatures are required to verify the provided information (page 4), and Commissioner signatures are requested to verify Commissioner consensus (page 4). Please print and use a black pen.**

Form submitted by: Robert Hale (your name) State: Georgia

Name of Nominee: Robert Hale

Address: 125 Peter's Quay

City, State, Zip: Savannah, GA 31410

Please provide the appropriate numbers where the nominee can be reached:

Phone (day): 9122248313 Phone (evening): _____

FAX: _____ Email: satdesk@yahoo.com

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FOR ALL NOMINEES:

1. Please list, in order of preference, the Advisory Panel for which you are nominating the above person.
   1. South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel
   2. _____
   3. _____
   4. _____

2. Has the nominee been found in violation of criminal or civil federal fishery law or regulation or convicted of any felony or crime over the last three years?

   yes_____ no X

3. Is the nominee a member of any fishermen's organizations or clubs?

yes X no_____

If "yes," please list them below by name.

Savannah Sport Fishing Club

CCA Georgia

4. What kinds (species) of fish and/or shellfish has the nominee fished for during the past year?

Sea Trout

Spanish Mackerel

Red Fish

Flounder

Black Drum

Tarpon

5. What kinds (species) of fish and/or shellfish has the nominee fished for in the past?

Inshore species

Green Water species

Blue Water species

FOR COMMERCIAL FISHERMEN:

1. How many years has the nominee been the commercial fishing business? _____ years

2. Is the nominee employed only in commercial fishing? yes_____ no_____

3. What is the predominant gear type used by the nominee?_____

4. What is the predominant geographic area fished by the nominee (i.e., inshore, offshore)?_____

FOR CHARTER/HEADBOAT CAPTAINS:

1. How long has the nominee been employed in the charter/headboat business? _____ years

2. Is the nominee employed only in the charter/headboat industry? yes _____ no_____

   If "no," please list other type(s)of business(es) and/occupation(s):_____

   _____

3. How many years has the nominee lived in the home port community? _____ years

   If less than five years, please indicate the nominee's previous home port community.

   _____

FOR RECREATIONAL FISHERMEN:

1. How long has the nominee engaged in recreational fishing? 40 _____ years

2. Is the nominee working, or has the nominee ever worked in any area related to the fishing industry? yes _____ no X_____

   If "yes," please explain.

_____

_____

_____

FOR SEAFOOD PROCESSORS & DEALERS:

1. How long has the nominee been employed in the business of seafood processing/dealing? _____years

2. Is the nominee employed only in the business of seafood processing/dealing?

   yes _____ no _____ If "no," please list other type(s) of business(es) and/or occupation(s):

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. How many years has the nominee lived in the home port community? 34 years

If less than five years, please indicate the nominee's previous home port community.

FOR OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES:

1. How long has the nominee been interested in fishing and/or fisheries management? 26 years

2. Is the nominee employed in the fishing business or the field of fisheries management?
yes ____ no X

If "no," please list other type(s) of business(es) and/or occupation(s):

Mercury and Yamaha Marine Dealership

FOR ALL NOMINEES:

In the space provided below, please provide the Commission with any additional information which you feel would assist us in making choosing new Advisors. You may use as many pages as needed.

Attached

Nominee Signature: Robert Hale Date:

Name: Robert Hale 12/10/2025
(please print)

COMMISSIONERS SIGN-OFF (not required for non-traditional stakeholders)

State Director

State Legislator

Governor's Appointee

Robert Hale is the **co-owner of Hale Marine** where, alongside his brother Timothy, he manages the day-to-day operations of their established Mercury and Yamaha Service Center. Robert is a dedicated figure in the local marine industry, blending his business expertise with a deep commitment to conservation and sports fishing.

He currently serves as the **Chair of Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) Georgia** and is a former President of the Savannah Sport Fishing Club (SSFC). Robert further applies his knowledge as a sitting member on the **Georgia Finfish Advisory Panel**, leveraging his recent MREP training to contribute to effective species management.

An active tournament angler, Robert and his team compete in 15–20 saltwater events annually, focusing on large trout and tarpon. A former recipient of the SSFC's Offshore Skipper of the Year (Neil Mingledorf Trophy), his passion for the resource is clear. He is particularly focused on the conservation and protection of large trout, holding a personal best of **31.5 inches, weighing over 10 pounds**. Robert is eager to serve on panels to help preserve these vital saltwater species.