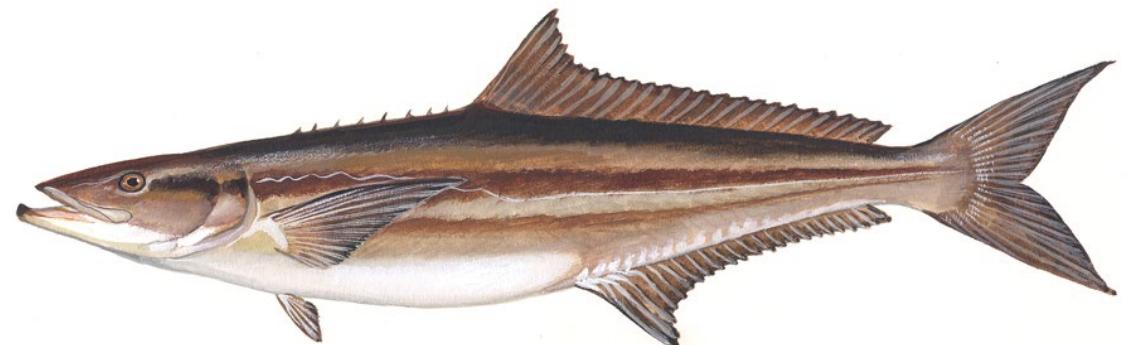


Draft Terms of Reference for the 2027 Atlantic Cobia Stock Assessment

Angela Giuliano, Cobia TC/SAS Chair

February 4, 2026



Background

- Initial assessment work began in 2024 through SEDAR
- Assessment paused due to availability of lead analyst
- Assessment restart in early 2026 with anticipated completion and peer review in 2027
- ASMFC coordinate Data, Methods, and Assessment Workshops
- SEDAR coordinate Peer Review Workshop/Report
 - SEDAR 107

Background

- Board approved SAS membership via email vote in December 2025

SAS Members	
Angela Giuliano (Chair, MDDNR)	Brad Johnson (NCDEQ)
Amy Schueller (NOAA, lead analyst)	Justin Yost (SCDNR)
Coly Ares (RIDEM)	Jimmy Kilfoil (SCDNR)
Kevin Weng (VIMS)	CJ Schlick (SCDNR)

*Staff Contacts: Emilie Franke (ASMFC), Chelsea Tuohy (ASMFC),
CJ Schlick (SCDNR)*

Background

- TC-SAS met in December 2025 to develop draft Terms of Reference for Board consideration
 - Assessment TORs
 - Peer Review TORs (correspond to assessment TORs)

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.

Corresponds to Peer Review TOR #1

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.

Corresponds to Peer Review TOR #2

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.

Corresponds to Peer Review TOR #4

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.

Corresponds to Peer Review TOR #6

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

Corresponds to Peer Review TOR #7

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

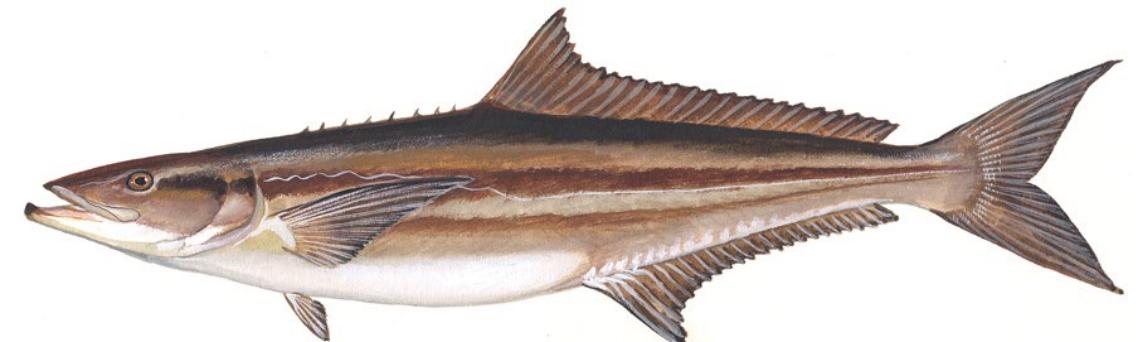
Corresponds to Peer Review TOR #8

Peer Review Report

Peer Review TOR #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.

Questions?

Atlantic Cobia: Next Steps and Timeline for Management



Coastal Pelagics Management Board

February 4, 2026

Coming Up for Board Discussion:

- New Specifications for 2027
- Recreational Management Measures for 2027

Timing Considerations:

- Revised MRIP
- Stock Assessment to Inform 2028

FMP in the Background: Confidence Interval Approach

- Current specifications for 2024-2026
 - Total annual harvest quota for both sectors = 80,112 fish
 - Same quota since 2020
- With current specifications expiring, consider new specifications for at least 2027
 - Board can set specifications for up to five years (2027 – 2031)
 - Timing: Stock assessment anticipated to inform 2028 quota levels and beyond

- Cobia TC will meet prior to the 2026 Summer Meeting to discuss TC recommendations on total harvest quota
- Challenge: limited information to inform 2027 specification
 - Projections from previous assessment extend only through 2024
 - Same data-limited situation as the 2024-2026 specs process

Regional Recreational Measures

- When specifications are set, evaluate average recreational harvest against harvest targets to determine any changes to recreational measures
 - Northern Region (RI-VA)
 - Southern Region (NC-GA)
- Evaluation includes years under the same recreational management measures
 - Measures changed in 2025 for the Northern Region
 - Challenge: evaluation to inform 2027 measures only includes one year of data (2025)

Regional Recreational Measures

Timing Considerations: Revised MRIP

- Revised MRIP time series could change regional allocation percentages
- Regional allocations based on 2014-2023 landings
- FMP allows Board to change allocations via Board action if the underlying MRIP data are updated
- Depending on timing of revised MRIP release, could be time to update regional allocations/targets for this year's evaluation to inform 2027 measures

Regional Recreational Measures

Timing Considerations: Stock Assessment

- New assessment anticipated to inform 2028 management
- Stock assessment could inform new total harvest quota for 2028, resulting in updated regional harvest targets for 2028
- New evaluation to inform 2028 measures (one year after potential changes to 2027 measures)

Regional Recreational Measures

- Similar timing challenge for 2024 recreational measures when the Board anticipated measures changing again in 2025 with new allocation addendum
- In that situation, the Board tasked the TC with evaluating the impact of maintaining status quo recreational measures for 2024
 - Board decided to maintain status quo in 2024 and re-evaluated measures in 2025 after allocation updates

Confidence Interval Approach

- Addendum II confidence interval provision allows Board to change method for evaluating recreational harvest against targets, if desired by the Board
- Current: Compare target to rolling average of harvest point estimates
- Alternative: Compare target to 95% confidence intervals around the harvest point estimates

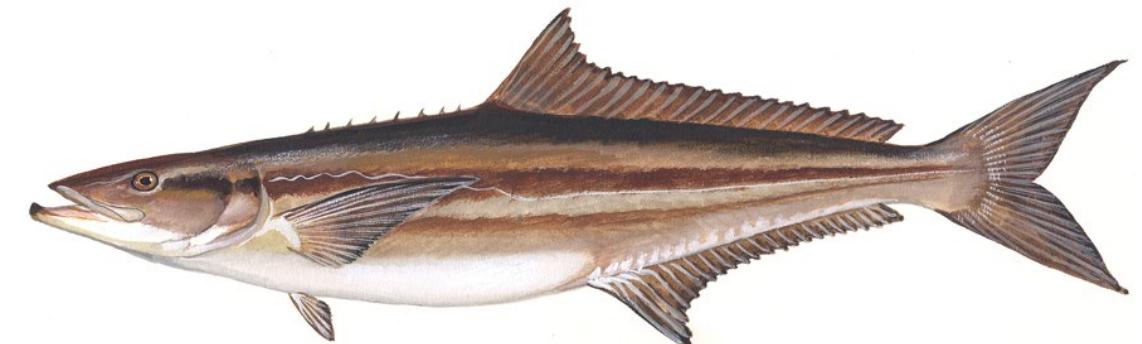
Confidence Interval Approach

- In October 2024, TC provided initial input on what the confidence interval approach might look like applied to current data, but suggested more time for consideration
- Board agreed that more discussion is needed
- Challenges include timing of this issue with specifications, revised MRIP, stock assessment

- 2026 Summer Meeting
 - TC report on 2027 total harvest quota recommendations
 - Board considers 2027 total harvest quota
- 2026 Annual Meeting
 - TC report on evaluation of regional harvest against the targets
 - Board considers 2027 recreational measures
- 2026/2027 timing TBD: Revised MRIP and potential Board consideration of updated regional allocations
- Mid-Late 2027: Anticipated Stock Assessment Report

Questions

Atlantic Cobia FMP Review: 2024 Fishing Year



Coastal Pelagics Management Board

February 4, 2026

- Status of the FMP
- Status of the Stock
- Status of the Fishery
- PRT Comments and Recommendations

- Sole management of Atlantic cobia by ASMFC (RI through GA)
- Amendment 1 (2019), Addendum I (2020), Addendum II (2024)
- 2024-2026 Total Harvest Quota = 80,112 fish
- Allocation: 96% recreational, 4% commercial
- Fishing year 2024 – no management changes; same as 2021-2023
- No monitoring requirements

Commercial Fishery

- 73,116 pounds coastwide commercial quota
- 33" FL / 37" TL minimum size limit
- 2 fish per person; 6 fish per vessel maximum
- *Non-de minimis* states monitor landings in-season against commercial closure trigger; if trigger reached, coastwide closure with 30 days notice

2024 Recreational Fishery

- State-by-state allocations
- *Non-de minimis*: VA, NC, SC, GA
 - 40" TL / 36" FL min. size
 - Seasons, vessel limits vary by state;
maximum 6 fish per vessel
 - 1-fish per person bag limit
- *De Minimis*: MD-northward
 - MD and PRFC match VA measures
 - RI-DE: 37" TL min. size, 1-fish vessel limit,
1-fish bag limit

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2025 Recreational Fishery

- Regional allocations
- Northern Region (RI-VA): Increased minimum size limit to 43" TL min. size with 2-fish vessel limit to meet reduction
- Status quo for Southern Region states (NC-GA)

Status of the Stock

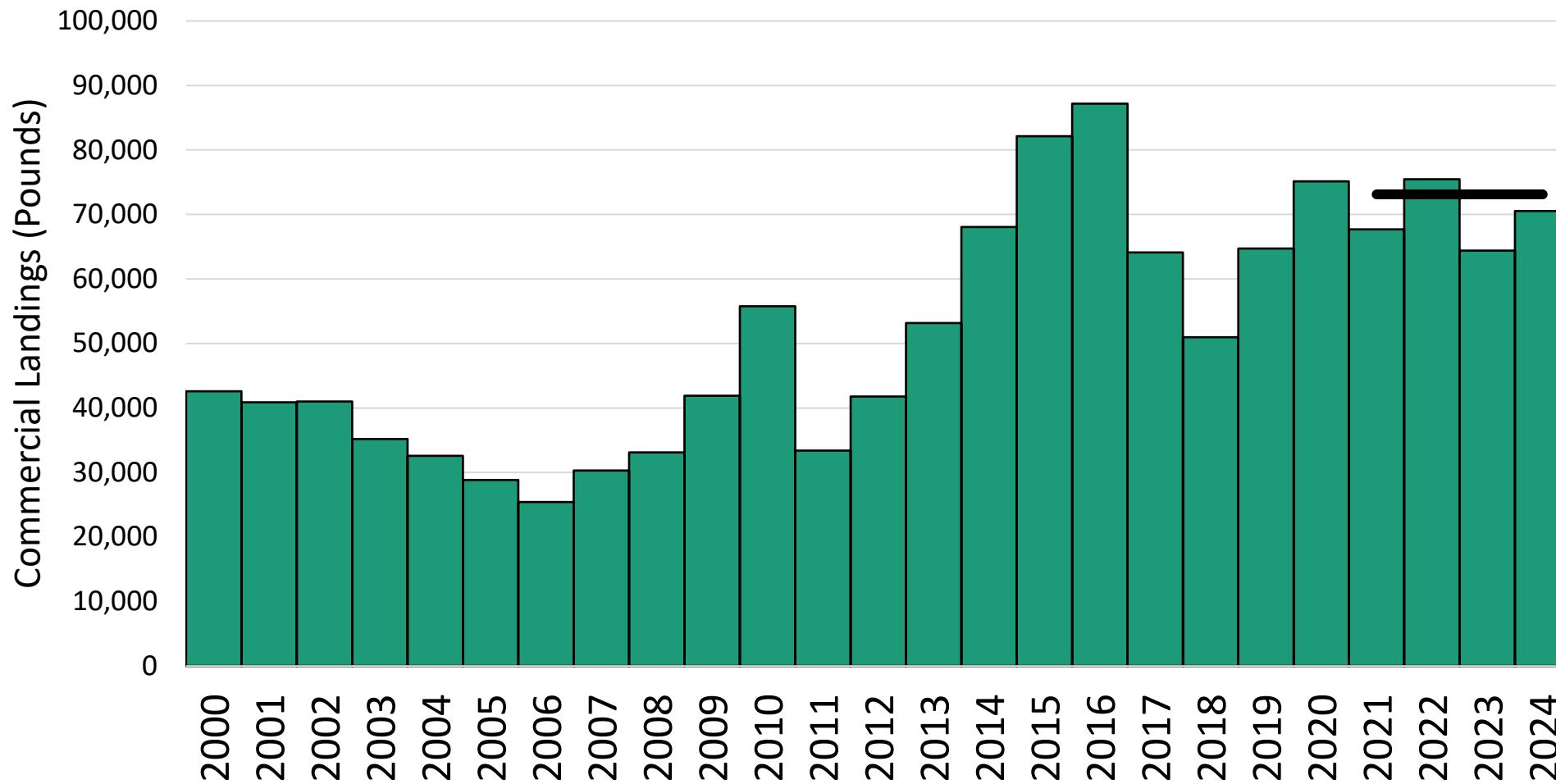
- SEDAR 58 (2020) with terminal year 2017
- Not overfished and overfishing not occurring
- Next assessment anticipated completion in 2027
 - SEDAR 107
 - Terminal year 2025

Status of the Fishery

- **2024 Total Landings: 1.7 million pounds**
 - 4% commercial; 96% recreational
 - 40% decrease from 2023 → decreased recreational landings
- **2024 Commercial landings: 70,546 pounds**
 - 10% increase from 2023
 - Quota not exceeded
 - Fishery closed December 18 based on closure trigger
 - Virginia (56%) and North Carolina (40%) majority of landings

Status of the Fishery

Commercial Landings and Current Quota



Status of the Fishery

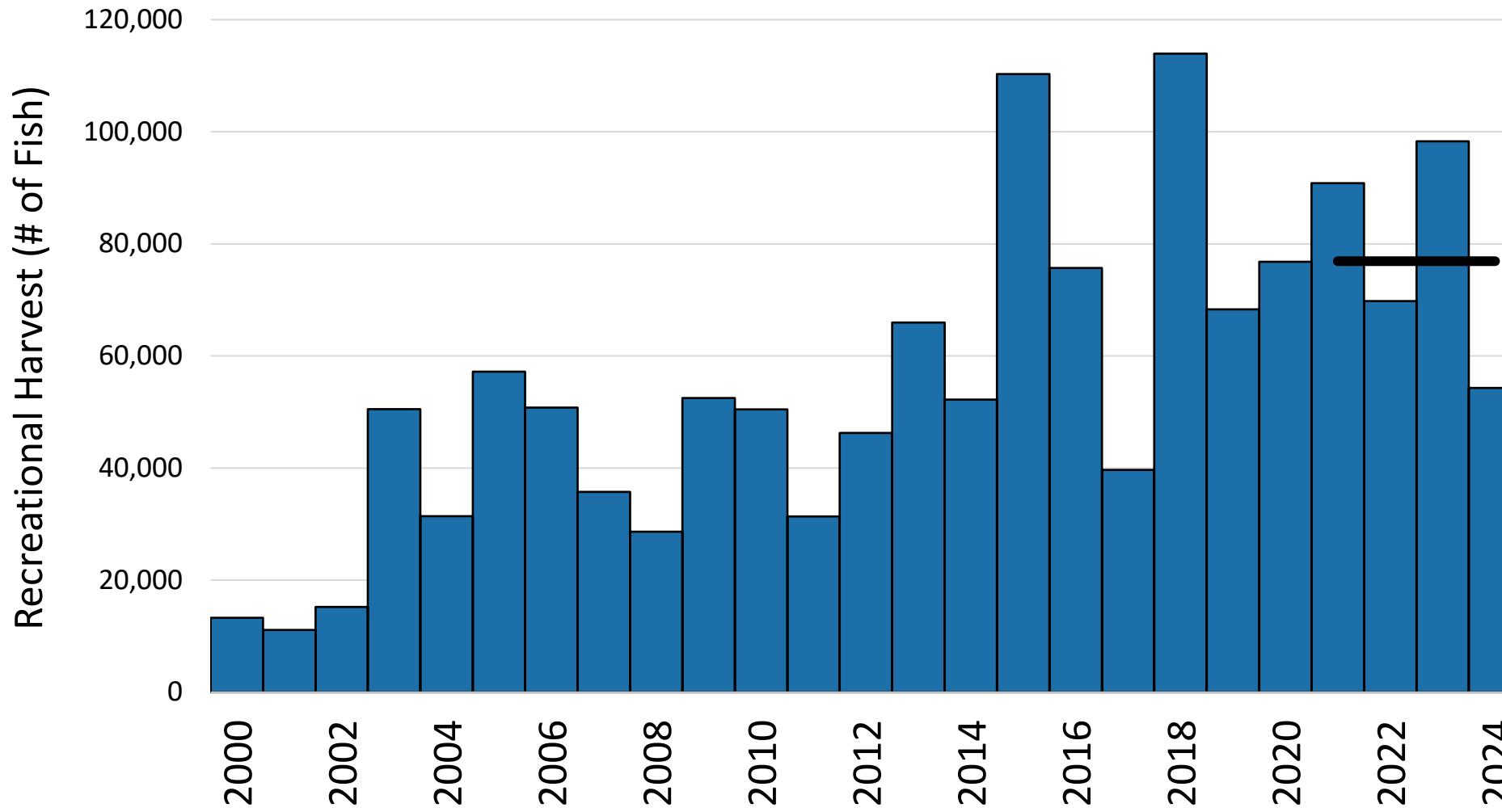
- **2024 Recreational Landings: 54,289 fish / 1.6 million pounds**
 - 45% decrease by number from 2023
 - Lowest harvest since 2017
 - Below the coastwide recreational quota of 76,908 fish
 - Below 10-yr average of 79,789 fish
 - MRIP directed trips decreased by 21% from 2023

2024 Recreational Live Releases: 220,820 fish

- 80% of 2024 catch released alive

Status of the Fishery

Recreational Harvest and Current Quota (# of Fish)



2024 Recreational Landings by State

- VA 83% - NC 7% - GA 5% - SC 3% - MD 3%
- North Carolina's 2023-2024 harvest estimates very low compared to prior years
 - Historically, primary wave of cobia arrive late May, available for ~6 weeks
 - Recently, anecdotal observations suggest cobia are migrating to Chesapeake Bay much earlier (April-May) and are in NC waters for shorter time
- South Carolina's 2024 harvest estimate is low compared to prior years (lowest since 2017)

Status of the Fishery

- Generally, PRT notes changes in harvest likely due to multiple factors, including stock distribution, fish availability nearshore or offshore, state regulatory changes, and level of effort

PRT Comments and Recommendations

- PRT found no inconsistencies in state implementation of the FMP
- Recreational *De Minimis*
 - Recreational harvest <1% of coastwide rec. harvest for 2 of 3 years
 - RI, DE, MD, FL request and qualify
- Commercial *De Minimis*
 - Commercial harvest <2% of coastwide comm. harvest for 2 of 3 years
 - RI, NJ, DE, MD, GA, FL request and qualify

- Multiple states could exceed *de minimis* thresholds over the next few years if cobia landings continue to increase in Mid-Atlantic
 - Commercial: Potential in-season commercial monitoring
 - Recreational: *de minimis* designation no longer affects state regulations under region-wide management framework

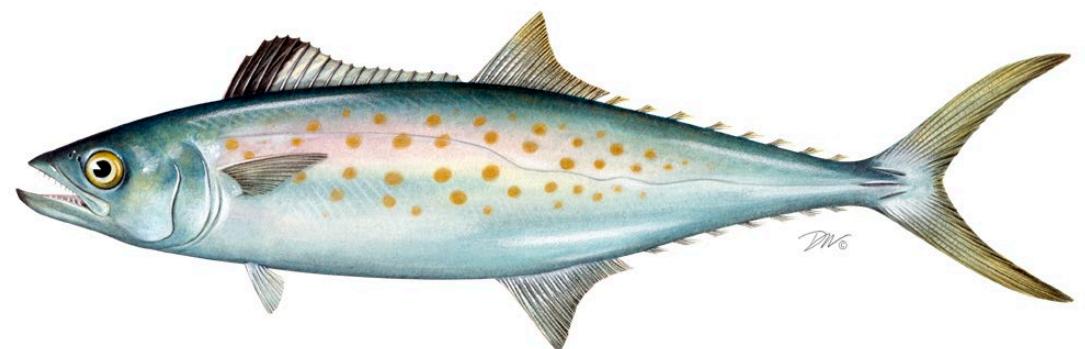
- New assessment will add several years of data (2018-2025) → capture recent trends of increased landings in Mid-Atlantic and transition to Commission-only management
- PRT emphasizes the importance of incorporating revised MRIP time series in the assessment

Questions?

Spanish Mackerel FMP Review: 2023 and 2024 Fishing Years

Coastal Pelagics Management Board

February 4, 2026



Status of the FMP

- Omnibus Amendment (2011) to the Interstate FMP
- RI through FL (Atlantic coast), except CT
- No Spanish mackerel monitoring requirements in FMP
- Complementary management with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
- Some differences between the Federal and Interstate FMPs

Recreational Fishery

- 12" FL or 14" TL minimum size limit; 15 fish creel limit
- Must be landed with head and fins intact
- Prohibited gear: Drift gill nets prohibited south of Cape Lookout, NC

Commercial Fishery

- 12" FL or 14" TL minimum size limit
- 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% adj. quota taken;
1500 lbs, when 75% adj. quota taken; 500 lbs after 100% of adj. quotas taken.
- Prohibited: purse seines; drift gill nets south of Cape Lookout, NC

Status of the Stock

- SEDAR 78 (2022)
 - Data through 2020
 - Operational (i.e., update) to SEDAR 28 (2012)
- Stock is not overfished; not experiencing overfishing (3-yr avg fishing mortality)
- In the terminal year of the assessment, the fishing mortality rate was above threshold; if the 2020 overfishing rate continues, the stock may fall into an overfishing status

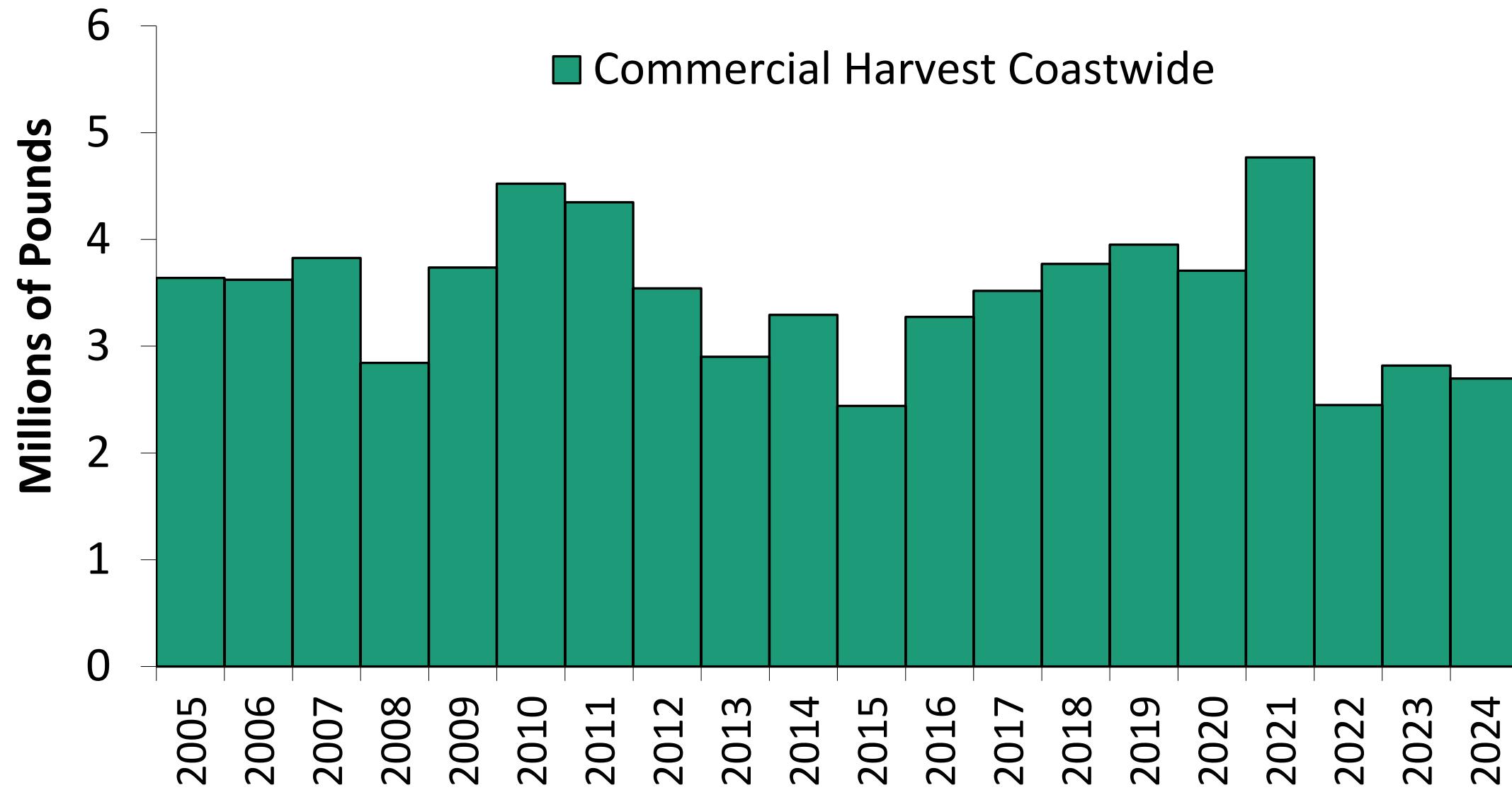
Status of the Fishery

- Landings in the FMP Review are calendar year
- Florida landings are Atlantic coast only

Status of the Fishery

- **Total 2023/2024 landings: 8.0 / 8.2 million pounds**
 - 33-36% commercial; 64-67% recreational
- **2023/2024 commercial landings: 2.8 / 2.7 million pounds**
 - Directed fisheries in FL, NC, VA
 - Peak in 2021 followed by decrease in 2022-2024 → driven by decreased Florida landings
 - Virginia's 2019-2024 commercial landings higher than previous decade (noted new gear; landings depend on factors such as fish availability)

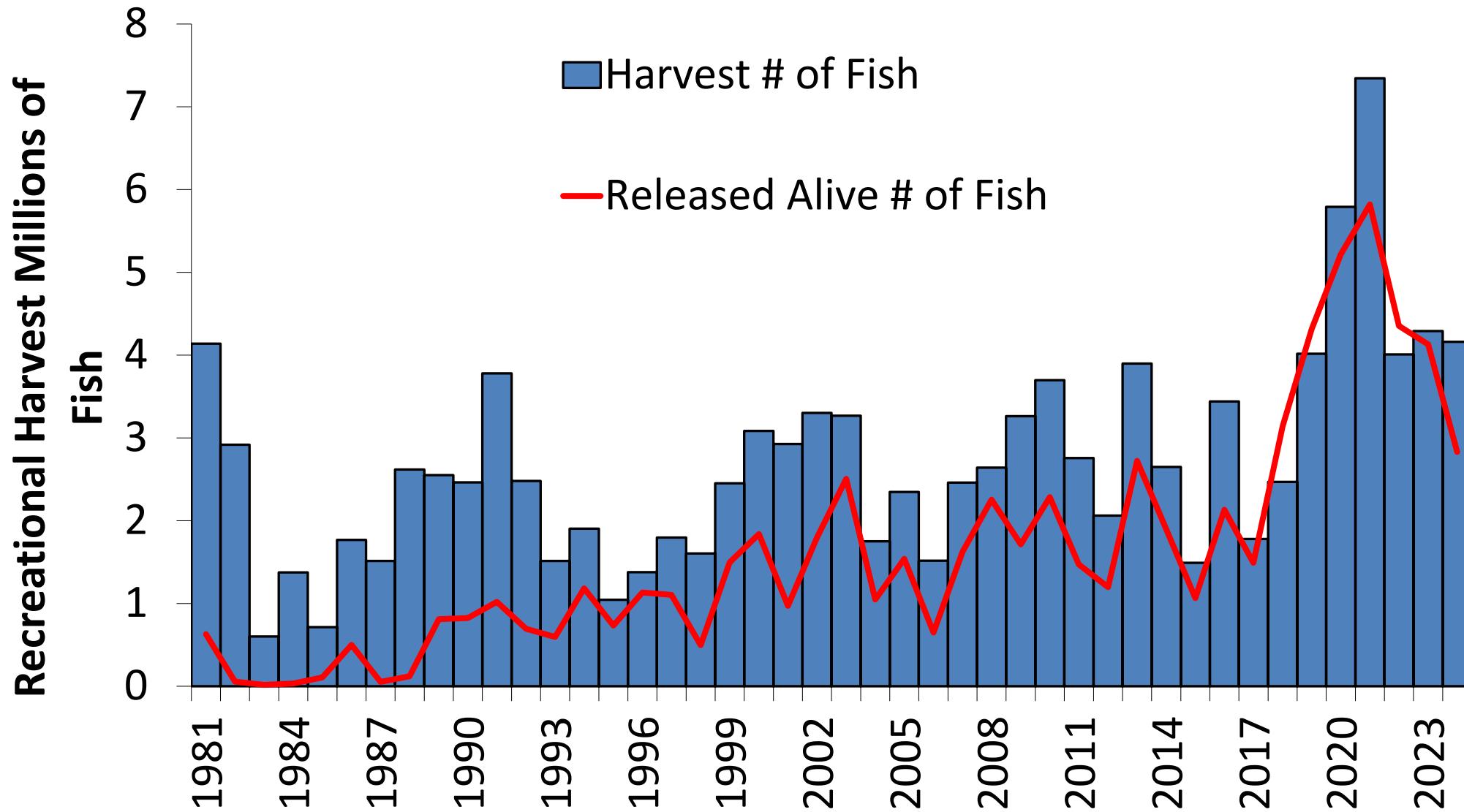
Status of the Fishery



Status of the Fishery

- **2023/2024 recreational landings: 5.2 / 5.5 million pounds**
 - Lower than 2021 peak, but above 10-year average
 - FL and NC account for majority of landings
- **2023/2024 recreational live releases: 4.1 / 2.8 million fish**
 - Decrease from 2021 peak
 - Comprised 40-49% of total recreational catch

Status of the Fishery



Status of the Fishery

- North Carolina flagged its 2024 MRIP estimates
 - 2024 harvest estimate 77% higher than 10-yr average in weight
 - 2024 harvest estimate 52% higher than 10-yr average in # of fish
 - 2024 release estimate 30% higher than 10-yr average
- NC notes estimates appear unusually high and diverge from anecdotal observation
 - Skewed by limited intercepts?
- NC notes PSEs are typically <20, but 2024 PSE >20

Status of the Fishery

- Lower landings in 2022-2024 driven partly by Florida fisheries
- Florida notes increase in areas closed to vessels to create safety zones associated with space launches → prevented access to fishing areas
- During Council port meetings, Florida stakeholders noted concerns about shark depredation, water quality, weather conditions in federal waters, fish shifting northward, and changing effort dynamics

PRT Comments and Recommendations

- All states in 2023 and 2024 implemented management consistent with the FMP except for one inconsistency that has since been addressed:
 - Potomac River Fisheries Commission had not implemented daily commercial trip limit of 3,500 pounds. After notification, PRFC implemented the trip limit two months later.
- *De minimis*: 3-yr average total landings <1% of coastwide
 - RI, NJ, DE, and GA request and qualify

PRT Recommendations

- Better understand dynamics across regions and changes in catch by region.
- Better understand life history components, particularly from fishery-independent surveys. Utilize available state data.
- Investigate discard mortality in both commercial and recreational fisheries.
- Better understand how environmental drivers affect distribution (north-south and inshore-offshore) and how social, economic, and regulatory drivers affect effort and participation. Stakeholder input from Council port meetings.
- Continue coordination between ASMFC and the SAFMC on future management action to address differences between the Interstate and Federal FMPs.

Questions?



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Management Update – ASMFC Winter Meeting

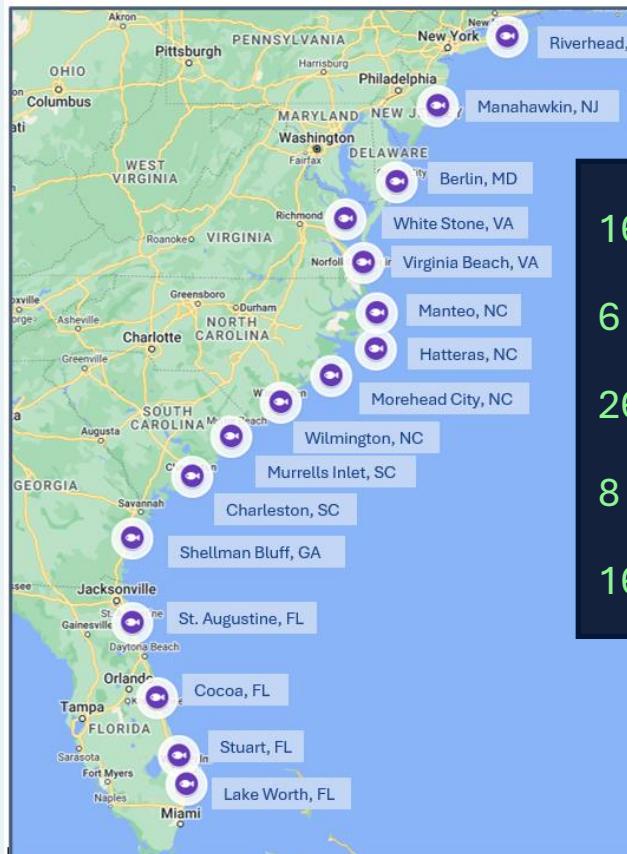
February 2026



2024
Mackerel Port Meetings



Full Report Available on
the [Council's Website](#).



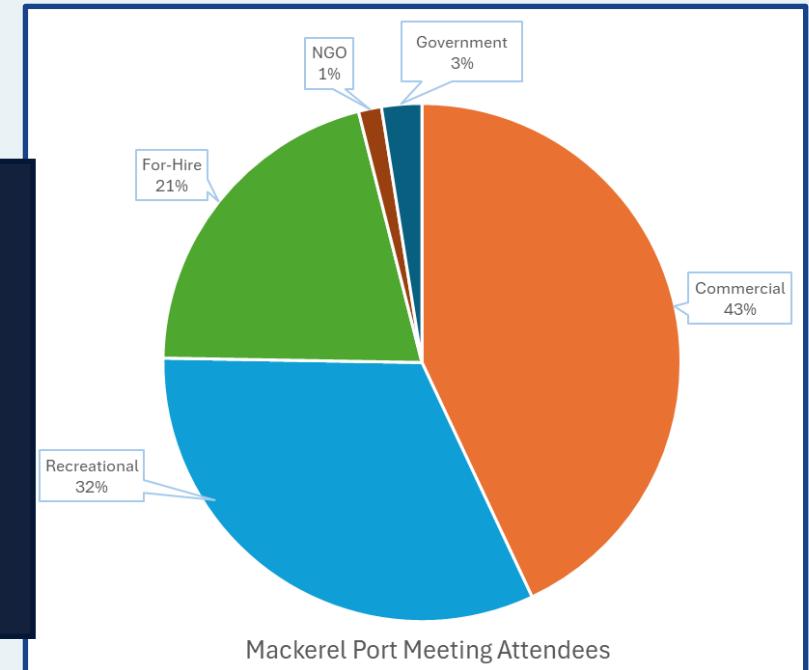
16 In-Person Meetings

6 Webinar Meetings

260+ Stakeholders

8 States Visited

160+ Pages of Notes



At their June 2025 Council Meeting, the Council reviewed the draft Mackerel Port Meetings report and provided the following direction to staff:

- Request a presentation from Gulf Council staff on their complimentary mackerel effort.
- Present the Mackerel Port Meetings report to the Mackerel Advisory Panel, along with other relevant activities.
- Bring more detailed information on specific regulatory measures to the June 2025 Council meeting.

[March 2025 Mackerel Cobia Committee Report](#)



March 2025
Council Reviews Report

April 2025

AP Reviews Report



At their April 2025 meeting, the Mackerel Cobia AP reviewed the Mackerel Port Meetings report and received an update on SEDAR 78 and revisions to the FMP goals and objectives.

MOTION 1: RECOMMEND THE COUNCIL REQUEST AN UPDATE OF THE ATLANTIC SPANISH MACKEREL OFL AND ABC RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE RESULTS OF THE FES PILOT STUDY BEFORE IMPLEMENTING ANY NEW CATCH LEVELS. APPROVED BY ADVISORY PANEL

[April 2025 Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel Report](#)

June 2025
Council Determines
Next Steps



At their June 2025 Council Meeting, the Council provided the following direction to staff:

- **Postpone work to address Atlantic Spanish mackerel catch levels until the results of the FES pilot study are received.**
- Work with the SEFSC to see if the next Atlantic Spanish mackerel assessment can occur sooner in the SEDAR schedule.
- Consider recommendations from port meetings in conjunction with an updated Atlantic Spanish mackerel stock assessment.
- 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.
 - *Note: this is not currently prioritized on the Council's workplan.*

[June 2025 Mackerel Cobia Committee Report](#)

Year	South Atlantic Branch			
	1	2	3	4
2025	S90 Red Snapper Benchmark	S92 Blueline Tilefish OA		
		BSB (Update)	S90 Red Snapper Benchmark	
2026		Gag Grouper (TWG)	S104 Dolphin MSE RW	
2027	Red Grouper (DW/Stock ID)	Snowy Update /TWG	Spanish Mack (TWG)	★ ★
2028	Red Porgy (TWG)	GAJ (TWG)	Vermilion Update	★
2029		Scamp	Tilefishes	
2030				
2031				

 August 2025

SEDAR Steering Committee

December 2025

FES Study Presentation

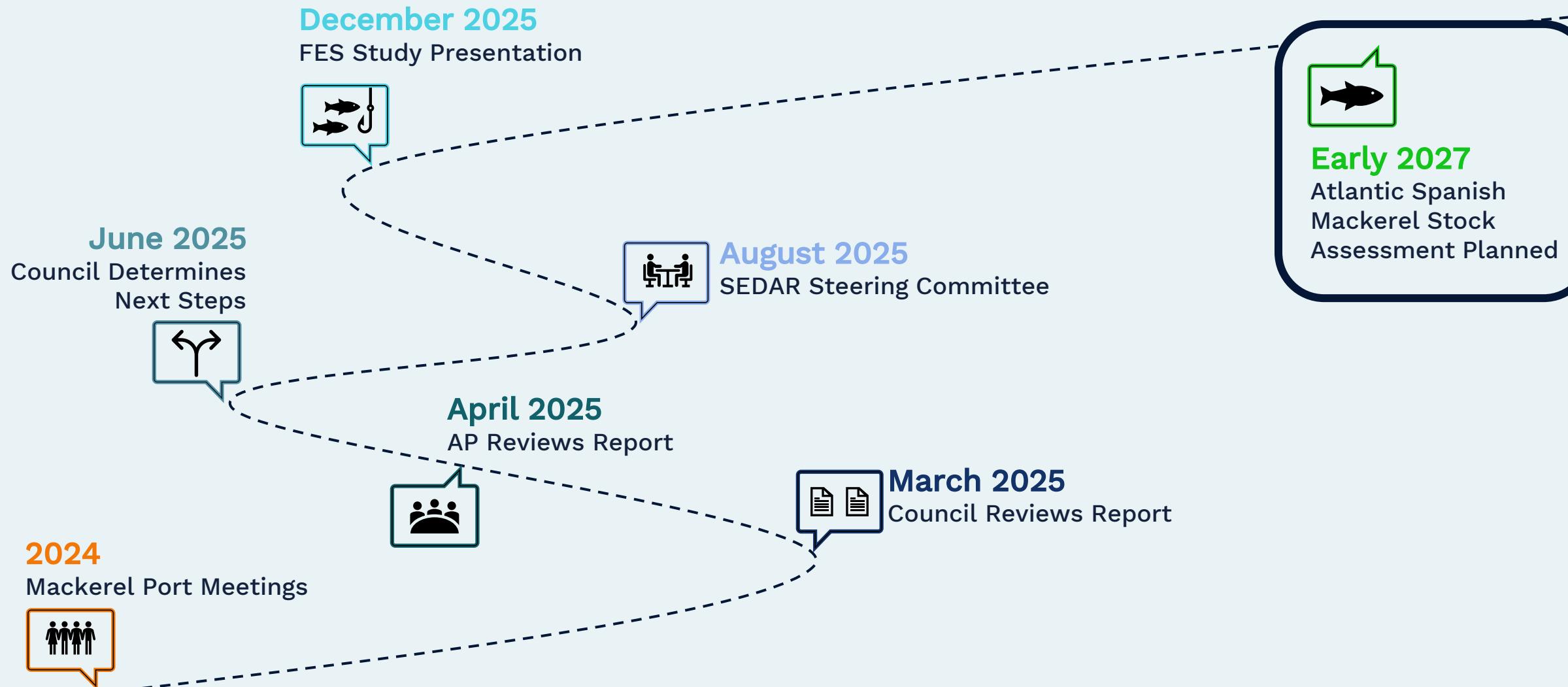


In December 2025, Dr. Katherine Papacostas delivered a presentation to update the Council on recent revisions to the MRIP Fishing Effort Survey.

MRIP anticipates having partial data for Wave 1 from the multiple mailings of the FES. They have been in touch with ACCSP and the states to investigate releasing partial data next year and plan to have full MRIP estimates for Wave 1 in 2027.

The Council noted that availability of recalibrated FES data as soon as possible is important.

[December 2025 Full Council I Report](#)





Questions?

Thank you to everyone who helped make the Mackerel Port Meetings effort a success! Including South Atlantic, Gulf, Mid-Atlantic, and New England Council members and staff, state agency staff from Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, and Atlantic States Commission staff.