



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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

MEMORANDUM

TO: Coastal Pelagics Management Board

FROM: Cobia Technical Committee

DATE: June 24, 2026

SUBJECT: Recommendation for 2027 Total Harvest Quota and Recreational Management Measures for Atlantic Migratory Group Cobia

The Cobia Technical Committee (TC) met via webinar on June 24, 2026 to discuss the 2027 total harvest quota, 2027 recreational management measures, and ongoing stock assessment for Atlantic migratory group (AMG) cobia.

TC Members in Attendance: Justin Yost (SC DNR), Chris Kalinowsky (GA DNR), Catherine Wilhelm (VMRC), Zachary Schuller (NY DEC), Melinda Lambert (NC DMF), Angela Giuliano (MD DNR), Nichole Ares (RI DEM), Jamie Darrow (NJ DEP), Michael Larkin (SERO)

ASMFC Staff: Chelsea Tuohy

Others in Attendance: CJ Schlick (SC DNR), Erika Burgess (FL FWC, Chair), Chris Batsavage (NC DMF)

2020-2026 Total Harvest Quota

The current total harvest quota for Atlantic cobia is 80,112 fish, which results in a coastwide recreational quota of 76,908 fish and a commercial quota of 73,116 pounds (3,204 fish)¹. This total quota level was first approved in February 2020 for the 2020-2022 fishing seasons² following the Atlantic cobia benchmark stock assessment. In May 2022, based on a recommendation from the TC, the Coastal Pelagics Management Board (Board) changed the cobia quota timeframe to 2021-2023, thereby, maintaining the harvest quota of 80,112 fish for the 2023 fishing season³. This change to the quota timeframe aligned with the timing of new recreational measures implemented by some states in 2021 following the change in quota allocation per [Addendum I to Amendment 1 of the Interstate Fishery Management Plan \(FMP\) for Atlantic Cobia](#). The TC noted that maintaining this quota level in 2023 carried a low risk considering the low projected probability of the stock being overfished (0.25), and considering average realized harvest in recent years was below the harvest projections associated with this

¹ For the commercial portion of the quota, the average annual coastwide commercial average weight from 2015-17 (22.8 pounds) was used to convert the commercial quota from numbers to pounds.

² January 2020 TC Quota Recommendations and Projections: <https://asmfc.org/resources/management-technical-committee/cobia-technical-committee-report-january-2020/>

³ April 2022 TC Quota Timeframe Recommendation: <https://asmfc.org/resources/management-technical-committee/cobia-technical-committee-report-april-2022/>

quota level. In 2023, the TC recommended and the Board approved keeping the total harvest quota status quo for 2024-2026 as no new information was available to inform a change in quota, updating projections that far from the terminal year of the previous assessment was not recommended due to increasing uncertainty, and a stock assessment was to be completed in the near future⁴.

TC Recommendation for 2027 Total Harvest Quota

Per [Addendum II to Amendment 1 to the Interstate FMP for Atlantic Cobia](#), the Board may specify a new coastwide total harvest quota for up to five years after expiration of previously specified measures, or following a completed stock assessment. Since the current total harvest quota specification expires in 2026, the Board may specify a new total harvest quota for 2027 through 2031.

The TC considered available data to inform the 2027-2031 total harvest quota. The 2020-2026 total harvest quota was informed by the 2020 stock assessment (SEDAR 58) and by additional projections provided by the NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) immediately following the 2020 assessment, which included a range of constant harvest and constant fishing mortality scenarios through 2024. In Spring 2023, the TC requested an updated set of projections from the SEFSC to inform the 2024-2026 total harvest quota. The TC requested that 2019-2022 realized harvest data be incorporated in the projections, and requested the projections be extended through 2026, if feasible. However, projections were not provided as the nine-year forecast from the assessment terminal year of 2017 through 2026 was well beyond the recommendation to limit analysis to five years and the SEFSC noted that a large portion of cobia removals were now outside the South Atlantic, which was inconsistent with the projection model.

Considering the lack of new information and ongoing stock assessment for AMG cobia, the TC recommends the Board set the cobia harvest quota at the status quo level of 80,112 fish for 2027 only. This results in a coastwide recreational quota of 76,908 fish and commercial quota of 73,116 pounds.

The TC noted that the ongoing stock assessment, scheduled to be completed in 2027, should inform future total harvest quota levels. On the current timeline, assessment information will be available in 2027 to inform the total harvest quotas for 2028 and beyond.

Recreational Harvest Target Evaluation and 2027 Recreational Management Measures

Per [Addendum II to Amendment 1 to the Interstate FMP for Atlantic Cobia](#), “Recreational landings are evaluated against recreational harvest targets at the same time as the specification process. Recreational landings for each region are evaluated against that region’s target as an average of annual landings. The timeframe for this average only includes years with the same

⁴ August 2023 ASMFC Coastal Pelagics Board Sets Atlantic Cobia Total Harvest Quota for 2024-2026 Fishing Seasons: <https://asmfc.org/news/press-releases/asmfc-coastal-pelagics-board-sets-atlantic-cobia-total-harvest-quota-for-2024-2026-fishing-seasons/>

recreational management measures”. Given recreational management measures changed in 2025, the 2027 recreational management measure harvest target evaluation only had one year of data for evaluation.

In 2025, there was a significant underage of each regional soft target and as a result, the coastwide quota, especially compared to recent harvest trends (Tables 1 & 2). Addendum II to Amendment 1 specifies that regions must restrict management measures if a region’s averaged recreational landings exceed its annual recreational harvest target over the evaluation period, and regions may liberalize management measures if a region reports a consistent under-harvest during an evaluation time period for a minimum of 2 years, but not prior to the completion of the next stock assessment.

Given the underharvest in 2025, guidance from Addendum II, and lack of new stock assessment information, the TC recommends keeping recreational management measures status quo in 2027.

During the discussion on recent recreational performance, the TC noted the significant underage in recreational quota in 2025 seems anomalous compared to recent years under the same total harvest quota. Acknowledging that some recreational management measures were restricted in 2025, the TC expressed interest in continuing to monitor recreational landings to observe if this significant underage is due to an abundance of undersized fish, lack of availability, or influenced by uncertainties in the MRIP information for this species.

Tables

Table 1: 2025 Regional Soft Target Performance.

Region	2025 Soft Targets	Harvest	Performance
Northern Region (RI-VA)	52,825 fish	17,386 fish	32.9%
Southern Region (NC-GA)	24,083 fish	13,687 fish	56.8%
Total	76,908 fish	31,073 fish	40.4%

Table 2: Coastwide recreational quota performance 2020-2025.

Year	Harvest	Quota Attainment
2020	76,786 fish	99.84%
2021	90,807 fish	118.07%
2022	69,800 fish	90.76%
2023	98,311 fish	127.83%
2024	54,289 fish	70.59%
2025	31,073 fish	40.40%
Average	70,177 fish	91.25%