

Mackerel Committee Report
January 27, 2016
Pam Dana – Chair

CMP Amendment 26

CMP Amendment 26 was approved for public hearings by the Council in October of 2015. The amendment addresses king mackerel annual catch limits (ACLs), commercial zone management, allocations, sale provisions, and recreational bag limits.

Action 1 - Adjust the Management Boundary for Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) and Atlantic Migratory Groups of King Mackerel

The Committee continued to support the Councils' preferred alternative, Alternative 3, which is also recommended by the Gulf and South Atlantic CMP Advisory Panels (AP).

Action 2-1 - Revise the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for Atlantic Migratory Group King Mackerel

The SEDAR 38 stock assessment showed that the Atlantic migratory group is healthy. The South Atlantic Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) provided acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations based on three recruitment scenarios (high, medium, and low). The South Atlantic CMP AP suggested that a large recruit class of small fish is coming into the Atlantic, and recommended Alternative 2, which was also recommended by the Gulf CMP AP.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 2-1, to make Alternative 2 the Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 2: Revise the ABC for Atlantic king mackerel for 2016/17 through 2019/20 based on the ABC levels recommended by the SSC for ABC under a high recruitment scenario.

Motion carried unanimously.

Action 2-2 - Revise ACLs, Commercial Quotas, and Recreational ACT for Atlantic Migratory Group King Mackerel

Gulf CMP AP members thought a more conservative ACL was not likely to affect either fishing sector. The AP thought that using the equilibrium yield was, in a way, a form of constant catch, which may help protect the stock in the event there is an issue with recruitment in the Atlantic migratory group.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 2-2, to make Alternative 3 the Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 3: Establish $ACL = OY = \text{Deterministic equilibrium yield at } F_{30\%SPR} = 12.7 \text{ mp}$ for fishing years 2016/17 through 2019/20.

Motion carried unanimously.

At their September 2015 meeting, the South Atlantic Council removed Alternative 6 from Action 2-2.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 2-2, to move Alternative 6 to the Considered but Rejected Appendix.

Motion carried unanimously.

Action 3 - Incidental Catch of Atlantic Migratory Group King Mackerel Caught in the Shark Gillnet Fishery

Options for retention of bycatch for Action 3 were set at either two fish or three fish, depending on which Atlantic commercial zone in which a commercial shark angler was fishing. Those retention limits are intended to reflect the recreational bag limits in the concurrent regions. The Gulf CMP AP did not think fish should be wasted, and did not foresee a directed bycatch fishery developing as a result of Alternative 3.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 3, to make Alternative 3 the Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 3: Allow retention and sale of Atlantic king mackerel caught with gillnet as incidental catch in the gillnet portion of the commercial shark fishery for any vessel with a valid shark directed commercial permit AND valid federal king mackerel commercial permit. The king mackerel must be sold to a dealer with the Southeast federal dealer permit. For shark gillnet trips in the Southern Zone, no more than 2 king mackerel per crew member can be on board, and no more than 2 king mackerel per crew member can be sold from the trip. For shark gillnet trips in the Northern Zone, no more than 3 king mackerel per crew member can be on board, and no more than 3 king mackerel per crew member can be sold from the trip.

Motion carried unanimously.

Action 4 - Establish Commercial Split Seasons for Atlantic Migratory Group King Mackerel in the Southern Zone

The main concern for the South Atlantic Council with respect to Action 4 is managing changes in catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) over time to keep the commercial king mackerel fishery in the Atlantic Southern Zone open. The movement of fishermen from that zone to the Atlantic Northern Zone and into the Gulf is largely driven by declines in CPUE, which

result in fishermen traveling to areas where fishing is better. Approximately 550 vessels are registered with commercial king mackerel fishing permits on the east coast of Florida. Though fishermen from the east coast of Florida are thought to be likely to travel regardless of season delineations, the Gulf CMP AP thought that establishing such a delineation may cause more fishermen to travel than do currently. Staff will consult fishermen in the Gulf Northern and Western Zones in the future to gauge the number of vessels which travel from the east coast of Florida.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, In Action 4, to make Alternative 1 the Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial fishing year for Atlantic king mackerel is March 1 – February 28. The Southern Zone quota is allocated for the entire fishing year.

Motion carried 6 to 2.

Action 5 – Establish a trip limit system for the Southern Zone

The IPT and the South Atlantic Council worked to consolidate what was previously Actions 5-1 and 5-2 into a single action.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, to accept the modifications to the language in Action 5 as proposed by the South Atlantic council and the IPT.

Motion carried unanimously.

Committee members thought that more information was needed on what was driving CPUE trends in the Atlantic Southern Zone before they could recommend a preferred alternative to the Council. Staff indicated that public hearings were underway in the South Atlantic, and staff would query fishermen for more details.

Action 6 - Modify the ACL for Gulf Migratory Group King Mackerel

Committee members did not modify the current preferred alternative (Alternative 2), which sets the ACL equal to the ABC.

Action 7 - Revise the Commercial Zone Quotas for Gulf Migratory Group King Mackerel

Staff reviewed the justification for including the east coast of Florida in the Atlantic migratory group, and described the need to address the commercial zone allocations in the Gulf. Gulf CMP AP members recommended Alternative 4, which they thought best represented a fair and equitable compromise for the distribution of the commercial allocation among the zones. Staff noted that, perhaps as a result of the change in the start date for the

fishing season in the Gulf Northern Zone from July 1 to October 1, more vessels in that zone participated in the commercial fishery in the 2014/2015 fishing season than in previous seasons. This suggests that the season change from CMP Amendment 20B has increased fishing opportunities in that zone.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 7, to make Alternative 4 the Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 4: Revise the commercial zone quotas for Gulf migratory group king mackerel as follows: 40% for the Western Zone; 18% for the Northern Zone; 21% for the Southern Zone Handline component; and 21% for the Southern Zone Gillnet component.

Motion carried unanimously.

Action 8 - Revise the Recreational and Commercial Allocations for the Gulf Migratory Group King Mackerel

Gulf Council staff described the 53% increase in recreational landings for the 2014/2015 fishing season, most of which are attributable to Florida. This recent increase in recreational landings suggests that reallocating recreational quota to the commercial sector, while also raising the recreational bag limit to four fish per person per day, could result in quota overages. The Gulf CMP AP thought the increase in recreational landings could be further increased by a change in the recreational bag limit, and affirmed their stance that the Council should not change sector allocations. Committee members agreed that the recreational sector's allocation should not be changed in such a way that would jeopardize that sector's ability to catch king mackerel year round.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 8, to make Alternative 1 the Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 1: No action – Maintain the current recreational and commercial allocations for Gulf migratory group king mackerel (68% recreational, 32% commercial).

Motion carried 5 to 2.

Action 9 - Modify the Recreational Bag Limit for Gulf Migratory Group King Mackerel

The bag limit analysis provided by the Southeast Regional Office was reviewed, and the methods used therein explained. The Gulf CMP AP ultimately recommended Alternative 2 as the preferred, citing the recent increase in recreational landings as a reason for not selecting Alternative 3.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 9, to change the preferred alternative to Alternative 2.

Alternative 2: Increase the bag limit to three fish per person per day.

Motion carried 5 to 1.

Other Business - Additional Recommendations made by the CMP AP

Recreational Bag Limits for Gulf Cobia

Gulf AP members discussed generally less frequent encounter rates with cobia, and noted that those cobia which were being caught were generally smaller than in past years. Gulf AP members thought it prudent to be proactive in the event that an issue exists with the Gulf's cobia population. Staff noted that an update of cobia landings would be available as a result of the MRIP recalibration work to be done by the Science Center in 2017.

Possession of the Recreational Bag Limit of King Mackerel on a Commercial Vessel When the Commercial King Mackerel Season is Closed

The current federal regulations prohibit the possession of the recreational bag limit of king mackerel on a commercial vessel when the commercial king mackerel season is closed, and on a dually permitted for-hire vessel unless that vessel is acting in a charter or headboat capacity [622.384(e)]. Gulf CMP AP thought this rule unfair, since it is the only one of its kind and does not apply to other species.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend that the Council remove the prohibition on retaining the recreational king mackerel bag limit on a vessel with a commercial king mackerel permit or a dually permitted charter vessel, when the king mackerel commercial season is closed, but while the king mackerel recreational season is open.

Motion carried unanimously.

Modifications to Electronic Reporting

Gulf AP members cited the need for an electronic reporting system for all commercial fisheries. With current technology, Gulf AP members think that fishermen can electronically submit their logbooks when the fish are sold to a dealer, thereby decreasing the amount of time it takes for commercial landings to be compiled for stock assessments. The Committee recommended this issue be forwarded to the Data Collection Committee.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my report.