

Mackerel Committee Report
April 4, 2016
Myron Fischer, Vice Chair

CMP Amendment 26

Staff took CMP Amendment 26 out for public hearings in late February and March of 2016. 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). Oral and written public comments received support the Councils' preferred alternative.

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 CMP AP suggested that a large recruit class of small fish is coming into the Atlantic. The Committee continued to support the Councils' preferred alternative, which is Alternative 2.

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

Based on public comments and testimony received, the South Atlantic Council changed their preferred alternative in Action 2-2 from Alternative 3 (ACL = OY = Deterministic equilibrium yield at $F_{30\%SPR} = 12.7$ mp) to Alternative 2 (ACL = ABC). South Atlantic fishermen stated that there is an abundance of young fish on the Atlantic coast, which they think is indicative of strong recruitment from a healthy stock.

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

Alternative 2: Revise the ACL and recreational ACT based on the ABC levels selected under Action 2-1. ACL = OY = ABC, recreational ACT = [0.5 or (1-PSE), whichever is greater].

Motion carried unanimously.

Staff were asked if the commercial sector of the Gulf king mackerel fishery could reopen in the spring if the proposed ACL increases in the document were approved. Staff replied yes,

so long as there was adequate time remaining in the current fishing season and that the sector's revised ACL had not yet been landed.

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

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 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. Of the 531 vessels registered with commercial king mackerel fishing permits on the east coast of Florida, only 106 had landings in any of the Gulf commercial zones between 2004 and 2015. Of those 106, only 35 had landings in *at least* 10 months within that time frame (138 months total). "High participation" traveling fishermen (~10 vessels) are thought to be likely to travel regardless of season delineations, usually from July – November. The number of traveling fishermen have increased since 2010, coinciding with a decrease in commercial king mackerel landings in the Atlantic. In recent years (2010 – present), those fishermen have landed approximately 50% of the commercial ACL in the Gulf Western Zone.

The South Atlantic's current preferred alternative is Alternative 2, which would allocate the Atlantic Southern Zone quota for Atlantic king mackerel into two split season quotas: 60% to the period March 1 - September 30 (season 1) and 40% to the period October 1 – the end of February (season 2). Any remaining quota from season 1 would transfer to season 2, with any remaining quota from season 2 not carrying forward. When the quota for a season is met or expected to be met, that season would close. The ratios for splitting the season coincide with the landings trend for the months specified for that season.

Committee members thought that the high participation traveling fishermen were likely to travel regardless of any split season structure. An increase in the Atlantic ACL (in Action 2-1 and 2-2) may help keep some traveling fishermen in the Atlantic. The "high participation" travelers are all well-known, operate larger boats than some of the newer entrants, and often sleep on their boats. Some committee members thought that Action 4 was not likely to impact Gulf fishermen either way.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 4, to make Alternative 2 the Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 2: Allocate the Atlantic Southern Zone quota for Atlantic king mackerel into two split season quotas: 60% to the period March 1 - September 30 (season 1) and 40% to the period October 1 – the end of February (season 2). Any remaining quota from season 1

would transfer to season 2. Any remaining quota from season 2 would not be carried forward. When the quota for the season is met or expected to be met, commercial harvest of king mackerel in the Atlantic Southern Zone will be prohibited for the remainder of the season.

Motion carried 4-1.

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

The South Atlantic Council selected Alternative 3, Option 3b and Alternative 4, Option 4a as preferred, citing a desire to keep moderate controls on fishing effort in order to ensure that the Atlantic commercial king mackerel fishing season stayed open as long as possible.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 5, to concur with the South Atlantic Council and to make Alternative 3, Option 3b and Alternative 4, Option 4a the Preferred Alternatives.

Motion carried unanimously.

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

The Committee continued to support the Councils' preferred alternative, Alternative 2, which is also recommended by the Gulf and South Atlantic CMP Advisory Panels (AP). Oral and written public comments received support the Councils' preferred alternative.

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

Gulf CMP AP members developed and recommended Alternative 4, which is currently preferred by both Councils, and which the AP thought best represented a fair and equitable compromise for the distribution of the commercial allocation among the zones. Oral and written public comments received by the Gulf Council support both Alternatives 3 and 4. The original Gulf commercial zone allocations were established in 1998, and were designed to protect the commercial king mackerel fishery in the Gulf Southern Zone while essentially capping the growth of the same in the Gulf Northern Zone. Committee members acknowledged that any of the alternatives in Action 7 were likely to disappoint someone. One Committee member remarked that an IFQ problem could solve a majority of the issues and complexities of the commercial king mackerel fishery.

The Committee Chair asked a Gulf CMP AP member, present in the audience, to clarify the AP's position. The AP member stated that effort in the Gulf Northern Zone has increased over the years, both from Gulf and traveling Atlantic fishermen, and that the effort from the traveling fishermen usually resulted in the Gulf Northern Zone's quota being met prior to the conclusion of the charter fishing season and prior to the arrival of king mackerel off the coast of Tampa Bay.

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

Both Councils currently prefer Alternative 1 (No Action). Oral and written public comments received by the Gulf Council largely support the Councils' preferred alternative; however, some support has been voiced for some variation of reallocation from the recreational sector to the commercial sector. A Committee member added that several of the issues within the Gulf commercial king mackerel fishery could be resolved by reallocation, including managing the stock at optimum yield.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 8, to make Alternative 4, Options b and f the Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 4: Conditionally transfer a certain percentage (*Options a-d*) of the stock ACL to the commercial sector until such a time that recreational landings reach a predetermined threshold (*Options e-g*). If this threshold is met, the recreational and commercial allocations will revert to 68% for the recreational sector and 32% for the commercial sector.

Conditional Quota Transfer (MUST CHOOSE ONE):

Option b: Transfer 10% of the stock ACL to the commercial sector.

Recreational ACL Threshold (MUST CHOOSE ONE):

Option f: Revert to the status quo sector allocations if 90% of the adjusted recreational sector ACL is landed.

Motion carried 3-2.

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

The Committee continued to support the Councils' preferred alternative, Alternative 2, which is also recommended by the Gulf and South Atlantic CMP Advisory Panels (AP). Oral and written public comments received support both the Councils' preferred alternative and the "No Action" alternative.

Other Business

Assessment of Mexican King Mackerel Landings

The Gulf of Mexico Large Marine Ecosystem project will co-fund a joint assessment of king mackerel between the United States and Mexico in either 2017 or 2018. Mexican Gulf of Mexico landings of king mackerel are thought to be comparable to US landings.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes by report.