

## Public Hearings Scheduled for Federal Mackerel, Cobia and Spiny Lobster Fisheries

### *Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) and other measures proposed for king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, cobia and lobster*

Federal fishery managers are soliciting public input on measures proposed for species managed jointly by the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Councils, including king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia. Measures are also being proposed for the lobster fishery, also managed jointly. Annual Catch Limits (in pounds or numbers of fish) and accountability measures (AMs) must be set for these species by the end of 2011, as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act to prevent overfishing. The measures will impact both commercial and recreational fishermen who fish in federal waters along the Atlantic coast and Gulf of Mexico. A series of 7 public hearings are scheduled regarding the following:

#### **Amendment 18 to the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan**

Because of their migratory nature, king mackerel and Spanish mackerel are currently managed between the two councils using separate migratory groups. Amendment 18 includes alternatives for setting ACLs for both Gulf and South Atlantic migratory group king mackerel and Spanish mackerel, as well as options for establishing a similar approach to management for cobia. The hearings will only address Atlantic Migratory Groups of king and Spanish mackerel and cobia; the Gulf Council will conduct hearings prior to June on Gulf Migratory Groups.

Under the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's preferred management alternatives for **king mackerel**, the ACL for the Atlantic Migratory Group would be set at 10.46 million pounds, and no additional restrictions would be necessary. The stock is not overfished nor undergoing overfishing. The current commercial ACL (quota) for Atlantic Migratory Group king mackerel is 3.71 million pounds. The allocation for king mackerel would stay the same, with 62.9% of the ACL allocated to recreational anglers and 37.1% to commercial fishermen. The current bag limit for king mackerel is 3 per person/day from Georgia through New York and 2 per person/day off the east coast of Florida. The minimum size limit for both commercial and recreational fishermen is 24 inches (fork-length).

Fishermen targeting **Spanish mackerel** in the South Atlantic could see a reduction in harvest with an ACL of 5.29 million pounds as proposed in Amendment 18. The current allocation of 45% recreational and 55% commercial would remain the same, but in order to avoid exceeding the ACL, the amendment contains a proposal to reduce the recreational bag limit from 15 to 10 fish per person/day. The annual commercial quota would be reduced from 3.87 million pounds to 2.91 million pounds. The stock is not undergoing overfishing, but a 2008 stock assessment could not determine if the stock was overfished. For **cobia**, the Council's preferred ACL alternative would keep current management measures in place with a 2 per person/day bag limit and a 33 inch fork-length minimum size limit. The commercial fishery operates under the same restrictions. The amendment contains alternatives to establish new sector allocations for cobia and possible spawning season closures.

#### **Spiny Lobster Amendment 10**

Amendment 10 to the Spiny Lobster Fishery Management Plan will meet the requirements to set ACLs and AMs to prevent overfishing of Caribbean spiny lobster in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. The amendment also considers possible **sector allocations** for spiny lobster in state and federal waters from North Carolina through Texas. The amendment contains management alternatives for several other issues regarding the lobster fishery, including: **removal of some species** of lobster from the Fishery Management Unit; **limiting fishing areas** to protect threatened staghorn and elkhorn corals; updating framework procedures and protocol for enhanced cooperative management; modifying **regulations regarding the use of "shorts" or undersized lobster** as attractants; modifying **tailing requirements** for vessels that obtain a tailing permit; requirements for **gear markings on trap lines** to help identify any

entanglements with endangered species; and provisions to allow public **removal of derelict traps**.

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**Public hearings for the amendments will take place from 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM.** Council staff will provide an overview of each amendment and be on hand to answer questions. Local Council representatives will take formal comments on the public hearing documents any time between those hours.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is also accepting written and email comments from **March 25, 2011 until 5:00 p.m. on April 29, 2011.** Copies of the public hearing documents with details on how to submit written comments will be posted on the Council's web site at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net) <<http://www.safmc.net>> and available by contacting the Council office at 843/571-4366 or Toll Free 866/SAFMC-10.

### **Public Hearing/Scoping Meeting Schedule**

**Monday, April 11**

Hilton New Bern Riverfront  
100 Middle Street  
New Bern, NC 28562  
Phone: 252/638-3585

**Monday, April 18**

Radisson Resort at the Port  
8701 Astronaut Blvd.  
Cape Canaveral, FL 32920  
Phone: 321/784-0000

**Tuesday, April 12**

Hilton Garden Inn  
5265 International Blvd.  
N. Charleston, SC 29418  
Phone: 843/308-9330

**\*Tuesday, April 19**

Hawks Cay Resort  
61 Hawks Cay Blvd.  
Duck Key, FL 33050  
Phone: 305/743-7000

**Wednesday, April 13**

Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum  
175 Bourne Avenue  
Pooler, GA 31322  
Phone: 912/748-8888

**\*Wednesday, April 20**

Doubletree Grand Key  
3990 S. Roosevelt Blvd.  
Key West, FL 33040  
Phone: 305/293-1818

**Thursday, April 14**

Crowne Plaza Riverfront  
1201 Riverplace Blvd.  
Jacksonville, FL 32207  
Phone: 904/398-8800

*\*Denotes joint hearing with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.*