

**Announcement of recreational fishing closure for
Atlantic (Georgia to New York) group cobia
Frequently Asked Questions**

When will recreational Atlantic migratory group cobia (Georgia to New York) be closed?

- The recreational harvest of Atlantic migratory group cobia will be closed in federal waters from Georgia to New York at **12:01 a.m. on June 20, 2016.**
- Recreational harvest of cobia will reopen on January 1, 2017.
- During the closure, recreational harvest or possession of cobia is prohibited.

Who will be affected?

- This closure applies to those fishing for cobia recreationally in federal waters from Georgia to New York, from a private vessel, charter vessel, or headboat.

Why will there be a recreational closure of Atlantic migratory group cobia (Georgia to New York)?

- Accountability measures are required by federal regulations to protect the cobia resource and prevent overfishing.
- Accountability measures help keep landings within the annual catch limits, or make adjustments if the annual catch limits are exceeded.
- The recreational accountability measure for cobia states if the recreational and total (recreational and commercial combined) annual catch limits are exceeded, NOAA Fisheries is required to reduce the length of the recreational fishing season in the following fishing year based on projections of when landings will reach the annual catch target.
- In 2015, the recreational annual catch limit of 630,000 pounds was exceeded by 910,776 pounds.
- Although the commercial sector did not exceed the annual catch limit of 60,000 pounds, combining the landings from both sectors exceeded the total annual catch limit of 690,000 pounds (Table 1).
- Because both the recreational and the total annual catch limits of Atlantic migratory group cobia were exceeded in 2015, the accountability measure to reduce the length of the recreational fishing season is triggered for 2016.
- Catch rates of cobia from 2013-2015 were examined to estimate when the annual catch target in 2016 would be expected to be met.
- Therefore, the recreational harvest of cobia will be closed on June 20, 2016, because the recreational annual catch target of 500,000 pounds is projected to be met by then.

Table 1. Recreational landings, annual catch limits, and annual catch targets in pounds whole weight for Atlantic migratory group cobia.

Year	Recreational Landings	Annual Catch Limit		Total Annual Catch Limit	Annual Catch Target
		Commercial	Recreational		Recreational
2015	1,540,776	60,000	630,000	690,000	520,000
2016+	-	50,000	620,000	670,000	500,000

What were the 2015 cobia recreational landings?

- Recreational cobia landings for the Atlantic migratory group cobia in 2015 were substantially higher than previous years (Table 2).
- Most of the landings were from state waters of North Carolina and Virginia.

Table 2. Recreational landings (pounds whole weight) of cobia from Georgia through New York during 2013-2015.

Year	GA	SC	NC	VA	Total
2013	29,224	19,130	492,969	354,463	895,786
2014	20,642	31,927	277,489	214,427	544,485
2015	67,804	123,952	630,373	718,647	1,540,776

Source: Southeast Fisheries Science Center

Do we know why the landings are higher in 2015 than in previous years?

- An increase in landings in 2015 could be attributed to greater fishing effort and larger fish being caught in 2015.
- The number of recreational trips that targeted cobia from New York to Georgia increased by 25% from 2014 to 2015.
- The average weights of cobia in the Atlantic migratory group area were higher in 2015 than in previous years.

How was the closure date determined?

- The 2016 predicted landings were generated from average 2013-2015 recreational landings. These landings are predicted to meet the ACT of 500,000 pounds on June 20th, 2016. The predicted landings are attributed to each state and shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Contribution of predicted recreational landings (pounds and percent of total landings) by state for the June 20th closure date. This was generated from average 2013-2015 recreational landings from January 1st to June 20th, and is based on the landings meeting the ACT of 500,000 pounds.

State	Pounds	Percent
Virginia	105,756	21%
North Carolina	284,649	57%
South Carolina	6,792	1%
Georgia	0	0%
Federal Waters	102,803	21%
Total	500,000	100%

Why is a closure occurring if most landings are from state waters?

- Cobia caught in state and federal waters counts against the federal annual catch limit.

Why does this closure not apply to fishermen off the east coast of Florida?

- Cobia from the east coast of Florida are part of the Gulf of Mexico migratory group.
- The boundary between the Gulf of Mexico migratory group and the Atlantic migratory group is the Georgia/Florida border.
- Genetic information from the most recent stock assessment for cobia indicates that the Gulf of Mexico cobia stock extends through the Florida east coast.

Will the closure for cobia apply to commercial fishermen?

- No. There are separate annual catch limits for the recreational and commercial sectors of Atlantic group cobia.
- Because the commercial annual catch limit was not exceeded, the closure in 2016 will only be for the recreational sector.
- However, the commercial sector could be closed if they meet or exceed their annual catch limit as well.

What is the status of the stock?

- Based on the Southeast Data, Assessment and Review stock assessment completed in January 2013, the Atlantic migratory group of cobia is not overfished (population size too low) or undergoing overfishing (rate of catching fish too high).

Can I fish for cobia in state waters?

- The recreational closure only prohibits harvest from Federal waters of Georgia to New York. Federal waters begin three nautical miles offshore of Georgia to New York and extend out to 200 nautical miles.
- However, some states have adopted compatible regulations.
- For information on closure of cobia in state waters contact your local state office on marine fishery issues.

Are new regulations being considered to extend the federal fishing season in 2017?

- The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council meets in Jekyll Island, Georgia from March 7-11, 2016, and will be discussing management measures for cobia that could potentially extend the fishing season in future years.

How can I get more information about the in-season closure?

- If you have further questions, feel free to contact NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office by phone at (727) 824-5305.