

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

Amendment 20B to the Fishery Management Plan for the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources of the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Region

*January 2015*

### **Who proposed changes for the coastal migratory pelagics (king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia) fishery?**

- The Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Councils (Councils) developed the management measures and proposed them to NOAA Fisheries.
- The coastal migratory pelagics fishery is jointly managed by the two Councils, so both Councils approved the proposals.
- NOAA Fisheries approved the amendment after taking comments from the public.

### **What does the final rule to Amendment 20B do?**

- Removes the trip limit reduction to 500 pounds for king mackerel in the Florida west coast Northern and Southern Subzones when 75 percent of the respective quota is landed.
- Changes the fishing year for the Florida west coast Northern Subzone to October 1 through September 30, or whenever the quota is reached or projected to be reached.
- Allows transit of vessels with king mackerel through areas closed to king mackerel fishing, if gear is appropriately stowed.
- Creates Northern and Southern Zones for Atlantic migratory group king and Spanish mackerel, each with separate quotas. NOAA Fisheries will close each zone when the respective quota is met or expected to be met.
- Makes administrative changes to the framework procedure for the management plan.
- Increases annual catch limits and catch targets for cobia and creates an East Coast Zone for cobia. This zone will have its own quota and NOAA Fisheries will close the zone when the quota is met or expected to be met.

### **Why is NOAA Fisheries removing the trip limit reductions?**

- The trip limit reductions were intended to extend the fishing seasons; however, NOAA Fisheries had difficulty implementing the reductions in a timely manner before the entire quota was landed because fishing rates were so high.
- Also, many vessels cannot make a profit if they can only land 500 pounds per trip.

### **Why is NOAA Fisheries changing the fishing season for the Northern Subzone?**

- Currently, the fishing year is July 1 through June 30. Some fishers indicated that a later opening will allow them to harvest king mackerel more efficiently because fish are present in larger numbers closer to shore in the fall.
- Fishermen also indicate cooler weather helps keep fish in better condition.
- A later opening might also discourage movement of fishers into the Florida Panhandle as has been the case for several years. Such a change could extend the fishing season.

### **Why is NOAA Fisheries allowing vessels with king mackerel to transit closed areas?**

- Many fishermen live and work near a boundary between two zones, and may wish to fish in one zone, but land in another. Previously, when a vessel's home port was located in a closed zone, the fisherman had to travel to another port within the open zone to land the catch.

- This action allows fishermen to operate their businesses more economically, and promotes greater safety at sea through decreased transit times.

### **Why is NOAA Fisheries creating zones for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel?**

- The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council expressed concern that the commercial quotas could be filled by fishermen in one state before fish are available to fishermen in other states.
- NOAA Fisheries can monitor the commercial quotas separately, and close federal waters in each zone when the respective quota is met or expected to be met.
- Quota can also be transferred between zones, increasing the chances of the total catch limit being harvested.

### **How was the annual catch limit divided between the zones?**

- The boundary between the zones is a line extending from the South Carolina/North Carolina state line.
- The allocation was based on landings from the 2002/2003-2011/2012 fishing years.
  - The Northern Zone allocation was calculated using combined landings from North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York.
  - The Southern Zone allocation was calculated using combined landings of South Carolina, Georgia, and the Florida east coast, including the Florida Keys on the Atlantic side.

### **Why is NOAA Fisheries changing the framework procedure?**

- These changes allow the Councils greater flexibility in changing accountability measures.
- Changes to regulations can now be made in a more timely manner.
- These same framework updates have been implemented for other fishery management plans in the Southeast Region.

### **Why is NOAA Fisheries creating an East Coast Zone for cobia?**

- The Councils previously established separate Atlantic and Gulf migratory groups of cobia using the Councils' boundary in Monroe County.
- The recent stock assessment results define Georgia north through the Mid-Atlantic area for the Atlantic migratory group, and the entire east coast of Florida through Texas for the Gulf migratory group.
- To adjust for this difference between the Councils' jurisdictional areas and the areas used by the stock assessment, the area including the east coast of Florida and Atlantic side of the Florida Keys (i.e., the area within the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction) is now the East Coast Zone and has a separate quota from the rest of the Gulf.
- The South Atlantic Council is responsible for regulations for this area, similar to how the East Coast Subzone for king mackerel is managed.
- This option offers increases in the current annual catch limits for both Councils, and is viewed as a fair and equitable distribution of the resource.

### **Where can I find more information on management of the coastal migratory pelagics fishery?**

- For more information, please visit

[http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable\\_fisheries/gulf\\_sa/cmp/index.html](http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_sa/cmp/index.html).