

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Summary of Public Comments on the Chub Mackerel Amendment
January 2019

The Council held five public hearings on the Chub Mackerel Amendment during December 2018 and January 2019 and also accepted written comments through January 18, 2019. The public hearings were attended by 21 members of the public, 14 of whom provided verbal comments. Ten individuals submitted written comments by email or through an online form. Ten organizations submitted written comments. In addition, the Pew Charitable Trusts submitted a letter with 14,957 signatures. Verbal and written comments are not included in this document but are available online at: <http://www.mafmc.org/actions/chub-mackerel-amendment>.

Comments in favor of alternatives presented in the public hearing document are summarized in Table 1. Most comments addressed high-level management questions rather than specific management measures. For example, most comments addressed the need to manage, or not manage, chub mackerel as a stock in the fishery, as well as the question of whether optimum yield (OY) should be less than or equal to the acceptable biological catch (ABC) value recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). In contrast, very few comments addressed the accountability measure (AM) and permitting requirement alternatives (Table 1).

The overwhelming majority of comments (14,974) supported managing chub mackerel as a stock in the MSB FMP (alternative 2). This alternative was supported by conservation advocates, as well as commercial and recreational fishermen and fishing organizations, and others. Four comments, representing commercial fishing interests, a recreational fishing organization, and a private citizen, supported no action on this amendment (alternative 2A). As shown in Table 1, most comments in favor of no action cited extreme data limitations. Most comments in favor of managing chub mackerel as a stock in the FMP cited ecosystem considerations and a general need for catch limits.

Most comments supported setting OY lower than the ABC. A total of 14,963 comments either asked the Council not to increase catch limits or specified that the landings limit should remain 2.86 million pounds per year, as implemented through the Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment. Three comments supported setting OY equal to the ABC.

A few comments addressed alternatives which were not included in the document. For example, limited access is not under consideration through this action but was recommended by three comments. All three comments essentially requested that only individuals with directed MSB commercial fishery permits be allowed to harvest notable quantities of chub mackerel, while all others be limited to incidental possession limits.

One individual recommended that recreational anglers using chub mackerel as live bait not be subject to AMs.

One comment suggested that if the Council sets the management unit as Maine through Florida, then expected South Atlantic catch need not be subtracted from the ABC, as described in the public hearing document, because the value of the expected South Atlantic catch would likely be inconsequentially small.

One comment requested that the Council engage more with highly migratory species fishery participants, specifically through Advisory Panel membership.

Table 1: Summary of comments in favor of alternatives presented in the Chub Mackerel Amendment public hearing document.

Alternative/ Sub-Alternative	Number of Comments in Favor and Example(s) of Rationale
1: No action	<p>4</p> <p><i>"It's a complete waste of time trying to come up with all the criteria needed for a management plan for something you know absolutely nothing about."</i></p> <p><i>"While RFA understands that the current specifications expire at the end of 2020, RFA cannot support moving forward with new specifications that nearly double the commercial chub harvest before the studies are concluded. RFA suggests extending the current commercial specifications through an addendum to the forage fish omnibus amendment until the studies are concluded and the council has the information necessary to move forward in a responsible manner."</i></p>
2: Manage chub mackerel as a stock in the MSB FMP	<p>14,974</p> <p><i>"What if Omega Protein steps in and says this looks like a good thing for this company? We could have no limits on it. Let's take this on... If you could put some limits on things now, it would make that more difficult."</i></p> <p><i>"The only hope we have long-term is gathering real data on this species. So, we really need an FMP. It seems like it's pointing us in that direction. If we have an FMP, we could find a way to get better data to find out how many there are. Because now we have no idea."</i></p>
2.A: Specifications process	--
2.A.i: No action on specifications	0
2.A.ii: MSB specifications process	5
2.B: Management unit	--
2.B.i: ME - FL	<p>3</p> <p><i>"Otherwise you could have a disjointed situation. We've seen it before with other fisheries."</i></p> <p><i>This "aligns with the SSC's ABC recommendation and gives the Council greater authority to regulate and conserve Atlantic chub mackerel throughout its range, consistent with an ecosystem-based approach."</i></p>
2.B.ii: ME - NC	<p>2</p> <p><i>"The management unit is not required to cover the area of the entire biological stock. We hope that the Council continues to investigate, with the SSC, what the entire biological stock area actually is."</i></p>

Alternative/ Sub-Alternative	Number of Comments in Favor and Example(s) of Rationale
2.C: Separation of commercial and recreational catch limits	--
2.C.i: No separation of com. and rec. catch limits	3 <i>"...because of current data limitations."</i>
2.C.ii: Division of one annual catch limit (ACL) into com. and rec. annual catch targets (ACTs)	2 <i>"It is premature to consider the recreational component of the fishery insignificant and eliminate the ability to use separate commercial and recreational allocations."</i>
2.D: AMs	--
2.D.i: In-season commercial fishery closures	--
2.D.i.a: When 100% of the quota is landed	1
2.D.i.b: When 95% of the quota is landed	2
2.D.i.c: When 90% of the quota is landed	1
2.D.ii: Possession limit when com. fishery is closed due to an AM	--
2.D.ii.a: 0 lb	0
2.D.ii.b: 1,000 lb	1 <i>"In order to catch that fish, they have to target that. So they would go after that 40,000 pounds, or whatever. So why would you even need that? If you want to allow a buffer, do it at 1,000 pounds."</i>
2.D.ii.c: 10,000 lb	2 <i>This "will discourage directed fishing after the fishery closes and accommodate incidental harvest."</i>
2.D.ii.d: 40,000 lb	2 <i>"Maximizing a conservative quota when the fish may be present is more valuable, even in terms of data potential from the catches, than discarding those fish if encountered."</i>
2.E: Permitting requirements	--
2.E.i: Commercial permit requirements	--
2.E.i.a: No action on commercial permit requirements	0

Alternative/ Sub-Alternative	Number of Comments in Favor and Example(s) of Rationale
2.E.i.b: Require any GARFO commercial fishing permit	1
2.E.i.c: Require any GARFO commercial MSB permit	1
2.E.i.d: Create a new commercial chub mackerel permit	0
2.E.ii: Party/charter permit requirements	--
2.E.ii.a: No action on party/charter permit requirements	1
2.E.ii.b: Require any GARFO party/charter permit	4
2.E.ii.c: Require a GARFO MSB party/charter permit	0
3: OY for upcoming years	--
3.A: OY = ABC	<p>3</p> <p><i>"The SSC has used its expert judgement in establishing this ABC."</i></p> <p><i>"This level of catch is not the result of an extensive amount of fishing effort but rather, as the catch data shows, the result of a small number of vessels targeting chub mackerel when it is available. We support the idea of switching species based on availability... especially if doing so may alleviate pressure on a species that is less abundant that year."</i></p>
3.B: OY is less than ABC	<p>14,965</p> <p><i>"Chub is a very data limited fishery and, as such, necessitates this careful, science-driven approach if we are to keep the stock and the commercial and recreational fisheries that depend on it healthy."</i></p> <p><i>"By keeping more fish in the water, managers can invest in the future of the resource as well as other fisheries that depend on healthy and abundant populations of chub mackerel. This precautionary approach to management is supported by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the National Standard guidelines, where attention should be given to managing forage stocks for higher biomass to enhance and protect the marine ecosystem."</i></p>