

Atlantic Mackerel Rebuilding 2.0 Amendment



The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council is collecting public comments on an amendment to continue rebuilding the Atlantic mackerel fishery. This document provides an overview of the alternatives. For details and commenting opportunities see <https://www.mafmc.org/actions/atlantic-mackerel-rebuilding-amendment>. Comments are due May 9, 2022. Contact: Jason Didden – jdidden@mafmc.org – 302-397-1131.

AMENDMENT PURPOSE: The 2021 peer-reviewed stock assessment found that Atlantic mackerel was overfished and that overfishing was occurring. Although a rebuilding plan for the stock was implemented in November 2019, the 2021 assessment found that the stock was unlikely to rebuild as anticipated. The stock size increased 180% between 2014 and 2019 but was still less than a quarter rebuilt. In response to this updated information, the Council is considering a new rebuilding plan for Atlantic mackerel.

REBUILDING ALTERNATIVES: This action contains five rebuilding alternatives (see table), all of which have been endorsed by the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) as being consistent with the best available science. This action will also set specifications for 2023. A 2023 assessment will be used for setting 2024 specifications later. For context, U.S. commercial catch in 2021 was about 5,603 metric tons (MT), and U.S. recreational catch was about 2,222 MT. Canadian commercial landings were about 4,395 MT. Canadian commercial discards and recreational catches are unmonitored.

Recruitment Assumptions	Rebuilding Alternative	10-Yr Rebuilding Probability
Poor recruitment for all 10 years	ALTERNATIVE 1: Eliminate most catch to rebuild as much as possible in 10 years.	57%
Recruitment starts low (similar to 2009+) and then increases toward long term (1975+) typical recruitment	ALTERNATIVE 2: Use a risk buffer from a fishing mortality rate of 0.14. Results in negligible U.S. total catch (commercial or recreational) for several years, followed by increases.	62%
	ALTERNATIVE 3: Use standard Council risk policy. Initially requires near zero U.S. commercial landings until 2025 (may increase discards) but accounts for Canadian catch and U.S. recreational catch. Catches increase throughout the 10-year rebuilding.	52%
	ALTERNATIVE 4: Use a fishing mortality rate of 0.12. Depending on set asides for Canadian catch and U.S. recreational catch, could allow for about 1,000-3,600 metric tons (MT) of U.S. commercial landings initially (slow increase predicted).	61%
	ALTERNATIVE 5: Use a fishing mortality rate of 0.14. Depending on set asides for Canadian catch and U.S. recreational catch, could allow for about 2,300-4,900 MT of U.S. commercial landings initially (slow increase predicted).	53%

COMMERCIAL MEASURES: The action proposes closures and trip limits to hold the commercial fishery near the target catches. The action considers a 3-inch minimum mesh for directed trawling (trawling accounts for most U.S. mackerel landings). There is minimal information on trawl mesh size related to Atlantic mackerel, but some escapement of small fish would be expected. The action would also set a 2023 river herring and shad cap for the commercial fishery (a standard part of specifications since 2014).

RECREATIONAL MEASURES: Recreational bag/possession limits of 10 or 15 fish are proposed, which might decrease recreational catch by 10%-30% (uncertain given the newness of Atlantic mackerel bag limits). U.S. law requires fair contribution toward rebuilding by all sectors while considering the relative economic impacts, and the bag limits are designed for that purpose. Seasonal closures are not being considered.

PERMITTING/REPORTING: To address some confusion about current regulations, the action will also clarify whether any possession of Atlantic mackerel in federal waters (beyond 3 miles and including bait) by commercial or for-hire vessels triggers federal permitting and electronic vessel trip report (VTR) requirements.