



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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MEMORANDUM

Date: May 2, 2024
To: Chris Moore
From: Jason Didden and Julia Beaty, staff
Subject: 2025 ABC reviews for the squids and chub mackerel – staff recommendations

This memorandum includes information to assist the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) in reviewing the previously set Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) limits for longfin squid, *Illex* squid, and chub mackerel. Additional information on recent trends in the fisheries, stock status, and past management measures can be found in the Fishery Information Documents which are included in the briefing materials for the May 2024 SSC meeting. The briefing materials also include Fishery Performance Reports summarizing input and recommendations from the Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Advisory Panel.

Longfin squid, *Illex* squid, and chub mackerel are all in multiyear specifications with the following ABCs:

Longfin squid: 2024-2026, constant ABCs of 23,400 metric tons (MT). The SSC set this multiyear ABC in July 2023, maintaining the same ABC that has been in place for over a decade. Key considerations included a 2023 management track assessment, a lack of trend in swept area biomass estimates, stability in catches over recent decades, and existing management measures that spread fishing effort seasonally and spatially.

***Illex* squid: 2024-2025, constant ABCs of 40,000 MT.** The SSC set this multiyear ABC in March 2023 equal to 2023's ABC (which had increased from preceding years). Key considerations included modeling building off the 2022 research track assessment, which suggested catches less than 40,000 MT are unlikely to risk overfishing. Evaluation methods were updated to include sampling uncertainty in the survey-based estimates of abundance in the NEFSC fall bottom trawl survey. Addition of this uncertainty did not significantly alter the risk evaluation given other existing uncertainties (e.g. natural mortality, availability of *Illex* to the fishing areas, and catchability of research trawl gear).

Chub mackerel: 2020-2025, constant ABCs of 2,300 MT (5.07 million pounds). The SSC recommended this ABC, the first ABC for Atlantic chub mackerel, in July 2018. Insufficient information exists to assess stock status and trends. For example, there is no stock assessment and this species is rarely caught in fishery-independent surveys in this region. Therefore, an overfishing limit could not be specified and the ABC is based on the SSC's expert judgement. The ABC is based loosely on the historic high for

commercial and recreational landings and assumptions about discards. The SSC agreed this level of catch is unlikely to result in overfishing given the general productivity of this species in fisheries throughout the world combined with the relatively low fishery capacity in U.S. Atlantic waters. The SSC reviewed this ABC each year from 2020-2023 and recommended no changes.

After reviewing available data and April 2024 Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Advisory Panel input, staff recommends maintaining the planned 2025 ABCs for all three of the above species. The primary rationales for maintaining the planned status-quo ABCs for each species are:

Longfin squid: No new assessment information is available. Landings and indices (NEFSC and NEAMAP trawl) continue to vary in historical ranges. No major ABC-related issues were identified by the Advisory Panel, which also recommended maintaining the status quo. A research track assessment is underway with a planned 2026 peer review.

***Illex* squid:** No new assessment information is available. Landings and indices (NEFSC trawl) continue to vary in historical ranges. No major ABC-related issues were identified by the Advisory Panel, which also recommended maintaining the status quo. A management track assessment is expected in 2025.

Chub mackerel: No stock assessments or survey indices are available. Commercial landings have been very low in recent years. Advisors have indicated that commercial fishermen are targeting other species. Recreational catch has been increasing, but is not yet of concern. Total landings (i.e., commercial and recreational) remain well below the total allowable landings limit (e.g., landings did not exceed 7% of the TAL in any year during 2017-2023). Advisors recommended that all measures remain status quo in 2025. No stock assessments are currently planned for chub mackerel.