



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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P. Weston Townsend, Chairman | Michael P. Luisi, Vice Chairman
Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

August 17, 2023

Mr. Michael Pentony
NMFS, GARFO
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

Dear Mike:

The Council is requesting that NMFS take emergency action to limit directed fishing for Atlantic mackerel. The Council made this request at its August 2023 meeting via the following motion:

I move for the Council to request that NMFS takes emergency action to limit directed mackerel fishing with trip limits of 20,000 pounds for limited access permits and 5,000 pounds for open access permits until 2024 specifications are implemented.

As described in the draft Supplemental Information Report (SIR), the 2023 Atlantic Mackerel Management Track Stock Assessment found that instead of an upward trend after 2018 as expected, the stock declined from 2018-2021 to a new all-time low. The stock appeared to increase marginally from 2021-2022 but we can now observe that both the 2018 and 2021 mackerel assessments overestimated their terminal year biomasses.

Projections suggest that if the full commercial quota is landed in 2023 (3,639 metric tons (MT)), as well as expected recreational catch (2,143 MT), commercial discards (115 MT) and updated expected Canadian landings (74 MT – the Canadians have closed their commercial fishery for 2022 and 2023), overfishing will occur in 2023 ($F = 0.23$ versus the 2023 assessment's estimate of a 0.21 overfishing threshold). The Council's SSC endorsed these projections. The relevant projections also indicate that a lower fishing mortality rate from 2024-2032 will be needed to rebuild the mackerel stock by 2032 with a 61% probability, and the Council will consider this when it finalizes 2024-2025 specifications later in 2023.

The 2023 data on recreational catch and commercial discards were not available but about 2,622 MT of mackerel have been commercially landed. Based on 2017-2022 NMFS quota monitoring reports, substantial weekly mackerel landings can occur late in the year, so closing the directed mackerel fishery now could result in less than the full 3,639 MT quota being landed, which would help to mitigate any overfishing in 2023. As such, this emergency action would minimize further depletion of an already overfished mackerel stock given the unexpected results of the 2023 assessment.

Please call me or Jason Didden of my staff if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'C' followed by a horizontal line that tapers to the right.

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D.
Executive Director