

MEETING OVERVIEW

ISFMP Policy Board Meeting

Thursday, May 4, 2016

10:15-11:45 a.m.

Alexandria, Virginia

Chair: Doug Grout (NH) Assumed Chairmanship: 10/15	Vice Chair: Jim Gilmore (NY)	Previous Board Meeting: February 4, 2016
Voting Members: ME, NH, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, PA, DE, MD, DC, PRFC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, NMFS, USFWS (19 votes)		

2. Board Consent

- Approval of Agenda
- Approval of Proceedings from February 4, 2016

3. Public Comment – At the beginning of the meeting public comment will be taken on items not on the agenda. Individuals that wish to speak at this time must sign-in at the beginning of the meeting. For agenda items that have already gone out for public hearing and/or have had a public comment period that has closed, the Board Chair may determine that additional public comment will not provide additional information. In this circumstance the Chair will not allow additional public comment on an issue. For agenda items that the public has not had a chance to provide input, the Board Chair may allow limited opportunity for comment. The Board Chair has the discretion to limit the number of speakers and/or the length of each comment.

4. Executive Committee Report (10:30-10:35 a.m.)

Background

- The Executive Committee will meet on May 3, 2016.

Presentations

- D. Grout will provide an update of the committees work

Board direction for consideration at this meeting

- none

5. Discuss Request from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to Consider a Cobia Interstate Fishery Management Plan (10:35-11:00 a.m.) Possible Action

Background

- The South Atlantic Council Fishery Management Council (Council) requested the Commission consider joint or complementary management of cobia with the Council (**Briefing Materials and Supplemental Materials**).
- In 2105, 82% of the cobia harvest occurred in state waters. The ACL was exceeded by approximately 910,000 pounds.
- The Council is looking for a more flexible management approach to allow for timely adjustments of measures but still provide equitable access across multiple jurisdictions while meeting conservation goals.

Presentations

- G. Waugh will review the Council request.

Board guidance for consideration at this meeting

- Does the board want to consider a cobia FMP?

5. Discuss Revisions to Conservation Equivalency Guidance Documents (11:00-11:05 a.m.)**Background**

- The Executive Committee tasked staff to update the Conservation Equivalency Guidance Document to reflect the current practices of the Commission.
- The MSC and ASC reviewed proposed revisions and made recommendations to the Executive Committee (**Supplemental Materials**).
- The Executive Committee will discuss the proposed revisions at the May 3 meeting.

Presentations

- T. Kerns will review the executive Committee discussion on the Conservation Equivalency Guidance Document

Board guidance for consideration at this meeting

- None

6. Joint Management and Science and Assessment Science Committee Report (11:05-11:20 a.m.) Action**Background**

- The Assessment Science Committee (ASC) and Management and Science Committee (MSC) met to discuss various issues and receive presentations on several topics. (**Briefing Materials**)
- The ASC has several recommendations to the ISFMP Policy Board regarding the ASMFC Stock Assessment Peer Review Schedule (**Briefing and Supplemental Materials**).
- Both scientific oversight committees discussed developing a Commission Risk and Uncertainty Policy and advised the formation of a multi-disciplinary workgroup.

Presentations

- S. Madsen will review (1) topics covered at the joint meeting, (2) the formation of a Risk and Uncertainty Policy Workgroup, and (3) changes to the stock assessment schedule (**Briefing Materials**)

Board actions for consideration at this meeting

- Approve the revised stock assessment schedule

7. Discuss Next Steps for Commission Action in Response to the Climate Change Workshop (11:20-11:35 a.m.)**Background**

- Climate change is impacting fishery resources and the communities that depend on them. How will management respond to current and future changes in climate and

<p>ocean and what can we do to identify ways to reduce risks and impacts to fisheries resources and those depending on them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Commissioner workshop will be held on May 3 to review Federal Climate Science Action Plans and Species Climate Vulnerability Assessments.
<p>Presentations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
<p>Board action for consideration at this meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

<p>8. Update on the Sturgeon Stock Assessment (11:35-11:40 a.m.)</p>
<p>Background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Benchmark stock assessment for sturgeon is schedule to undergo peer review in the fall of 2017.
<p>Presentations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K. Drew will present an update on progress for the sturgeon assessment
<p>Board actions for consideration at this meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

<p>9. Law Enforcement Committee Report (11:40-11:45 a.m.)</p>
<p>Background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Law Enforcement Committee will meet on May 3 and 4, 2016
<p>Presentations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on LEC activities by M. Robson
<p>Board action for consideration at this meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

11. Review Non-Compliance Findings, if Necessary

12. Other Business

13. Adjourn



Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP) Framework Amendment 4

**Why is the ASMFC being asked to consider
complementary management of cobia?**



Prepared by: **SAFMC Staff**

Presented by: **Gregg Waugh, Executive Director**

ASMFC Policy Board: May 4, 2016

Brief History of Cobia Management

- **GM/SA FMP (1983)** – 1 stock TX->NC; MSY=1.057MP; 33"FL
- **AM 1 (1985)** – FY=Jan-Dec; 33"FL or 37"TL
- **AM 2 (1987)** – annual com & for-hire permit for April->March
- **AM 3 (1989)** – prohibited drift gillnets
- **AM 5 (1990)** – MSY=1MP & avg catch 81-89=1.9MP; overfishing definition; added to stock assmt process; 2/p/d w/1 day limit
- **AM 6 (1992)** – 33"FL only; MSY=2.2MP (92 Mack Stock Assmt)
- **AM 8 (1996)** – range->MAFMC; OY=MSY= 2.2MP
- **AM 11 (1998)** – Spawning Potential Ratio (SPR) for biomass parameters rejected; MSY=unknown; OY=all harvest while SPR>or=40%StaticSPR; overfishing>30%; threshold=10%



Brief History of Cobia Management

- **AM 18 (2011)** – regs eff. 1/30/12; new MSA requirements (new rec quotas); **2 migratory groups: TX->FLWC & FLEC->NC**; 98% Rec/2%Com based on 50% 2000-08 & 50% 2006-08; MSY unknown; OFL unknown but use total ACL to determine overfishing
 - Atlantic Migratory Group: ACL=ABC=OY= 1,571,399 lbs (avg. of 2000-09 FLEC->NC landings +1.5x standard deviation of landings)
 - Rec ACL=1,445,687 lbs; Rec ACT=1,184,688 lbs
 - Com ACL = 125,712 lbs
 - Com AM = track & close; payback if overfished & C > total ACL
 - Rec AM = if Rec & Total ACL exceeded shorten season; use 1 year then avg. 2, then avg. 3 unless ACL changed & restart; payback if overfished & C > total ACL
 - Continue with 33"FL & 2/p/d w/1 day limit



Brief History of Cobia Management

- **SEDAR 28 (2013)** – data thru 2011; **new stock boundary GA->NY** not overfished/no overfishing; Review Panel approved; SSC approved: MSY = 808,000 lbs; OFL & ABC in million pounds; ABC = max. landings Councils can allow

	OFL	ABC
2014	0.81	0.73
2015	0.76	0.69
2016	0.73	0.67



Brief History of Cobia Management

- **AM 20B(2014)** – regs eff. 3/1/15; implement SEDAR/SSC values; **2 migratory groups: TX->FLEC & GA->NC**; kept 98% Rec/2%Com based on 50% 2000-08 & 50% 2006-08; MSY=808,000 lbs; OFL = 760,000 for 2015 & 730,000 lbs 2016 and beyond
 - ACL=ABC=OY= 690,000 in 2015 & 670,000 lbs 2016 onwards
 - Rec ACL= 630,000 (2015) & 620,000 lbs 2016 onwards
 - Rec ACT= 520,000 (2015) & 500,000 lbs 2016 onwards
 - Com ACL = 60,000 (2015) & 50,000 lbs 2016 onwards
 - AM no change: Com AM = track & close; payback if overfished & $C > \text{total ACL}$; Rec AM = if Rec & Total ACL exceeded shorten season; use 1 year then avg. 2, then avg. 3 **unless ACL changed & restart**; payback if overfished and $C > \text{total ACL}$
 - Continue with 33"FL & 2/p/d w/1 day limit



Why taking action?

- Rec ACL decreased from 1,445,687 lbs (FL Keys->NY) to 630,000 lbs (GA->NY) based on new stock ID and SEDAR 29/SSC ABC results
- Rec Catch GA->NY = 1,540,775 lbs in 2015 = 129% over the Rec ACL and over Total ACL
- Accountability Measures triggered and recreational season for 2016 must be shortened to prevent exceeding the 2016 Rec ALC of 620,000 lbs; aiming for ACT of 500,00 lbs to estimate season length; season closes June 20th
- Council is working on Framework to change AMs & bag/size/season to prevent closure in 2017
- Council is asking if ASMFC is interested in developing a joint/complementary plan for state waters; pulse fishery with high catches in state waters



Timing

An in-person **Public Presentation and Q&A** will be held on **May 9, 2016**, at 6 p.m.:
Hilton Garden Inn Outer Banks/Kitty Hawk
5353 N. Virginia Dare Trail
Kitty Hawk, NC

- Council selects actions/alternatives and approves for public hearings at the next **SAFMC meeting in June 13-17, 2016**, in Cocoa Beach, FL
- Public hearings week of August 8th (Midway, GA; Bluffton, SC; Morehead City, NC; Kitty Hawk, NC; & Virginia Beach, VA)
- MAFMC input during their August 8-11, 2016 meeting in Virginia Beach, VA
- SAFMC review public input and approve for formal review at September 12-16, 2016 meeting in North Myrtle Beach, SC
- Sent for formal review and implementation by September 30, 2016
- Target new regulations implemented prior to April 2017



COBIA QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Prepared by John Carmichael, Deputy Director for Science & Statistics

April 18, 2016

This document was prepared to examine questions that may be raised by the Council concerning the cobia AM application for 2016. It is in no way intended to serve as an analysis of the status of cobia or the management changes necessary to prevent overfishing in 2016. Rather, it is intended to provide a simple, summary overview of some of the major trends in the fishery, place them in context of stock status as estimated by the 2013 stock assessment, and consider whether some of the typical causes of sudden, unexpected spikes in MRIP landings estimates are at work in this situation.

NOTE: This document was modified on April 17 2016 to clarify that the 'rec OFL' derived here for illustration is based on the OFL implemented in Amendment 20B to the CMP FMP.

How does the 2015 landings spike compare to long-term trends in the fishery?

- The 2015 estimate of landings in MRIP is the highest on record

Landings values as reported by MRIP, for GA to NY, were plotted for 1981-2015 to show how 2015 compares with the past. Values were obtained from an MRIP website query, so no calibration for 2013-2015 APAIS survey changes is applied and weight values will not match exactly to those from the SERO ACL database. Initial estimates were obtained April 4, and then updated on March 1 to include any Wave 6 landings (there were none for 2015). Landings from the headboat fishery are not included, so the figures here do not represent the full recreational component. Therefore, any overages of OFL or ACL were actually greater than shown here.

A hypothetical "recreational OFL" was derived to provide some reference for overfishing, by multiplying the annual OFL specified in Amendment 20B (in pounds) by the recreational allocation of 92%. Note this is not an official management parameter, it was simply derived for illustration purposes in this document, intended to provide some context on the potential impact of the 2015 landings on the stock.

Amendment 20B to the CMP FMP established an OFL based on landings consistent with the 50% P* recommendation of the SSC, and an ABC based on landings consistent with the P* recommendation of 40%. Management quantities chosen by the Council and based on the SSC recommendations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Management parameters for GA-NY cobia stock, 2014 and 2015. Values are in pounds, whole weight.

YEAR	Total Yield*		Landed Yield, as specified in CMP A20B		Recreational		"rec OFL"
	ABC	OFL	ABC	OFL	ACL	ACT	
2015	726,700	792,800	690,000	760,000	630,000	520,000	699,200
2016	706,500	766,700	670,000	730,000	620,000	500,000	671,600

*Total Yield = Landings + Discards

Preliminary recreational landings in pounds for 2015, not including headboat landings or MRIP Wave 6, are an all-time high at 1.7mpds (Type A+B1; A is observed harvest, b1 is unobserved harvest)(Figure 1). This value is well above the management benchmarks and any measure of prior landings (NOTE: this is the value reported by MRIP. It differs from the value in the ACL database used by SERO to monitor quotas and evaluate AMs due to an alternative approach for dealing with gaps in weight samples). It is 1.5x the prior peak observed in 2006, 3.7x the estimate for 2014, 2.9x the average from 2010-2014, and 2.7x the 2015 recreational ACL. Considering values in numbers, the 43,737 estimate of A+B1 harvest in 2015 is a series high, 1.7x the previous high of 25,554 reported in 2006 and 2.1x the average of the last 5 years.

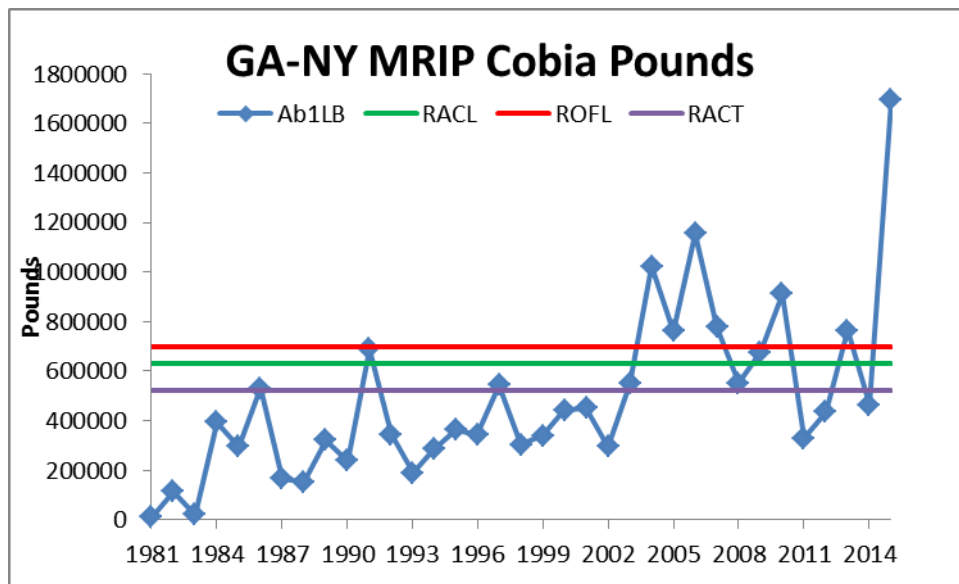


Figure 1. Cobia landings for New York through Georgia in pounds reported by MRIP for catch types A+B1 (AB1LB), 1981-2015, with reference lines denoting the 2015 recreational ACL (RACL), hypothetical recreational OFL component (ROFL), and the 2015 recreational ACT (RACT). Reference lines were extended back in time to indicate how past landings match current productivity estimates and management parameters; please keep in mind that these are annual values that were not in place until 2014.

Is there any evidence that the 2015 recreational spike is an anomaly, perhaps related to a spike in landings in a single area or to a substantial change in average weight?

- No evidence that the increase is narrow in range.

2015 landings increased in all states, in pounds as well as in numbers. Type A+B1 numbers were up in 2015 relative to 2014 by 2.9 in GA, 3.6 in SC, 1.6 in NC and 3.4 in VA.

- Trips targeting and catching cobia increased in 2015.

Effort directed toward cobia, as evidenced by trips indicating cobia as a target species, increased in 2015 (Table 2). Successful trips, as evidence by trips that encountered a cobia (indicated as Type A (observed harvest), Type B1 (discarded alive), or Type B2 (unobserved harvest, discarded dead or unseen by samplers)) also increased in 2015 relative to 2014.

Table 2. Trips that targeted or encountered cobia, 2014 and 2015 as reported by MRIP for GA-NY.

Year	Target Trips	Successful Trips	Successful %
2014	165,369	40,951	0.25
2015	206,528	60,313	0.29

- There is indication of a slightly higher mean weight in 2015.

Overall, numbers of fish were up by 2.4x and pounds of fish were up by 3.65x in 2015 relative to 2014. Mean weight, calculated from overall A+B1 estimates in pounds and numbers and shown in Figure 2, increases about 50% from 25 to 38 pounds between 2014 and 2015. The average 2010-2014 average is 28 pounds. To consider if the change in mean weight is a reason for the landings spike, the 5 year average mean weight was substituted for the 2015 value to estimate an alternative A+B1 in pounds (multiplying the alternative mean by A+B1 numbers). This produces an alternative estimate of pounds landed of 1,223,374, which is still nearly 2x the 2015 OFL. Therefore, the 2015 landings are a peak even if the mean weight change is removed.

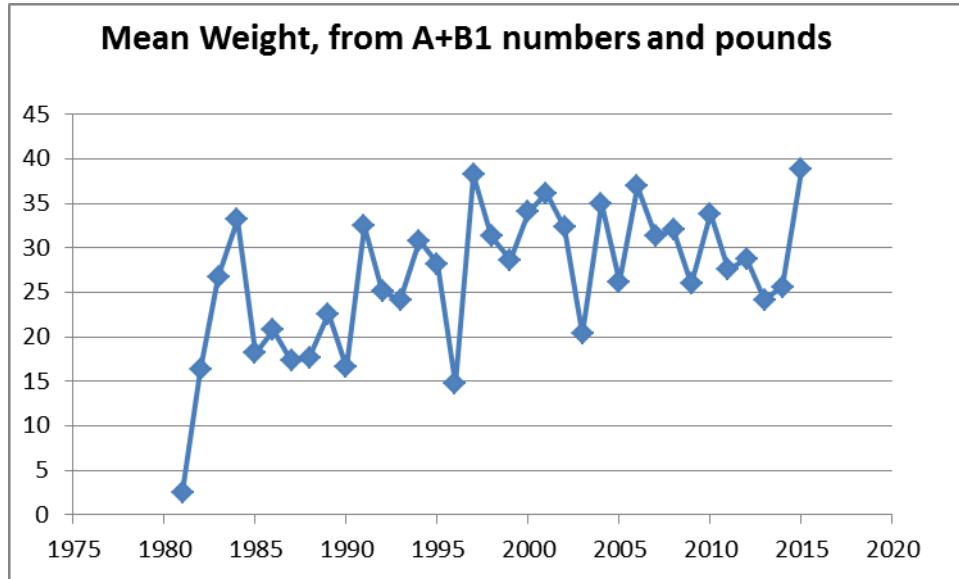


Figure 2. Mean weight for cobia, calculated from MRIP reported landings in pounds and numbers.

The 2015 mean weight is the peak of the series, beating the 1997 value by half a pound. While the increase over 2014 and 2013, and from 2011-2014 is noticeable, the 2015 estimate is not an obvious outlier when the whole time series is considered.

- 2015 mean weight is high, but this does not appear to be the sole explanation for the increased landings.

Is there any evidence that the 2015 recreational catch estimate is particularly uncertain?

- No evidence of an increase in PSE in 2015.

The MRIP program provides a value for “PSE”, Percent Squared Error, which is a measure of statistical uncertainty and error in the estimation that is calculated such that it can be compared across species regardless of their level of catch or frequency in the survey. Recall that MRIP is a survey based estimate procedure, and all surveys have some level of error in their estimates. Higher PSE values indicate an estimate with higher error and lower precision. The amount of data used for an estimate directly influences its precision, so species commonly encountered by anglers and thus encountered by MRIP samplers of those anglers typically have lower PSE, on the order of 10 – 20. Rare species can have much higher PSEs, even exceeding 100.

Since sample size affects PSE, its value depends on whether a fine scale catch estimate is desired, such as for a wave, mode, year and state, or whether a broader scale estimate is desired, such as for a region and year. While MRIP provides various regional aggregations for catch estimates, there is not one that matches the range of the GA-NY cobia stock. Using an aggregation of the full Atlantic Coast would include FL, thereby including both a separate stock and an area of high cobia encounters, thereby biasing the overall PSE downward and implying greater precision than exists for the GA-NY stock. Special queries can be conducted, but doing so was beyond the intent and time available for this analysis. Therefore, PSE was examined on a state and year basis to provide an illustration of overall trends in precision.

Most cobia from this stock are landed in VA and NC, followed by SC and GA. Typically lower PSE scores in VA and NC therefore reflect the greater frequency of cobia (Figure 3). MD to NY are not included as cobia seldom appear in the catches in those areas; in recent years the only reports are of small numbers of discarded cobia in NJ in 2015, 2012 and 2010. Cobia PSE values in 2015 are among the best in recent years in VA and NC. PSEs scores are also trending downward recently, perhaps reflecting ongoing efforts to improve the MRIP program.

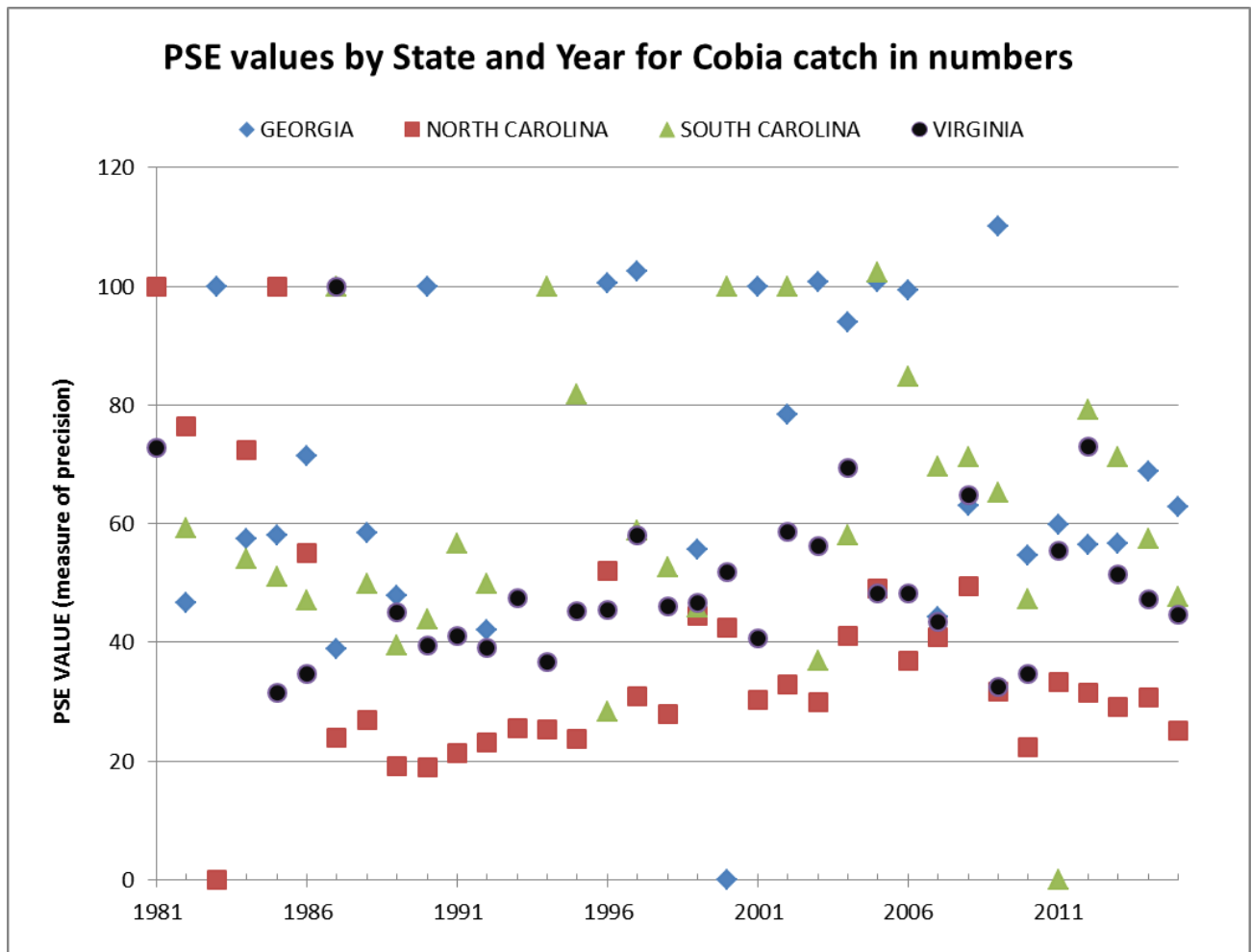


Figure 3. PSE values for Cobia, by state and year.

Did overfishing occur during 2004-2010, when there are numerous years of landings exceeding the estimated Rec OFL?

Figure 1 suggests that overfishing of cobia was occurring in the recent past, since landings exceeded the overfishing levels. However, many recall that the assessment outcomes indicated the stock was neither overfished nor overfishing. The time series of the overfishing measure, F/F_{msy} was added to the landings plot to compare trends in the two measures of the population (Figure 4). This shows that overfishing was approached, in 2006, but the threshold MFMT was not exceeded.

- The stock assessment did not show a period when overfishing occurred.

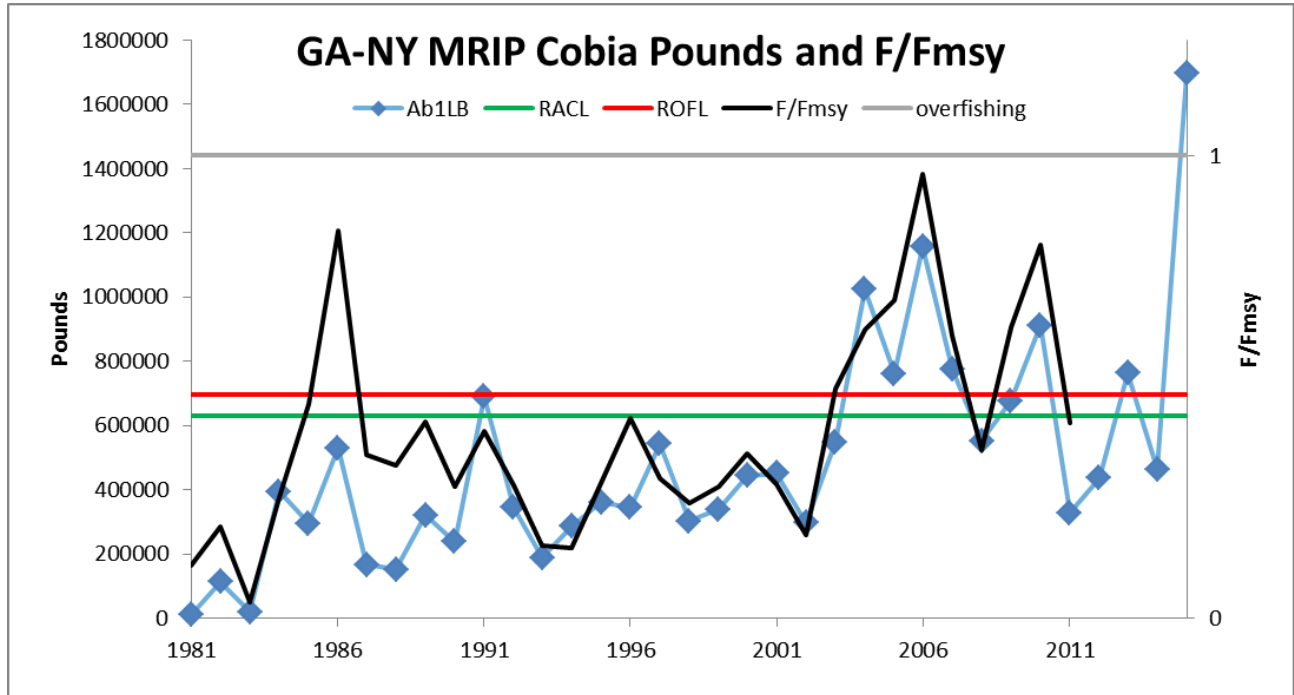


Figure 4. Cobia landings trend and 2015 benchmarks as shown in figure 1, overlaid with F/Fmsy estimated from the last assessment. Note that F/Fmsy is referenced on the right hand axis, and values exceeding 1 indicate overfishing. Assessment results indicate that overfishing is not estimated to have occurred during those years when OFL was exceeded ($F/F_{msy} < 1$).

It may seem counterintuitive that overfishing was not occurring despite landings exceeding benchmarks and equilibrium MSY. However, that this can and does happen illustrates the difference between yield and exploitation (fishing mortality) rates, and the role of stock biomass in the relation between those two measures of stock performance. When biomass is very high, above Biomass at MSY levels as was the case for cobia in the 1990's, yield exceeding MSY can be taken for a short while and maintain fishing mortality rates below Fmsy. This is the same mechanism that the Council has used to 'fish down' other stocks temporarily, such as mackerel and black sea bass, taking yields that exceed equilibrium MSY values while staying within fishing mortality (MFMT) thresholds.

Examining the biomass estimates for cobia indicate high spawning stock biomass relative to MSY levels in the 1990's and 2000's (Figure 5). At that time SSB was as much as 2.5 times SSB/SSBmsy, and such biomass levels could support short term landings above MSY without leading to excessive exploitation rates. However, removing more than the average the stock can support has a cost, and such action is called "fishing down" because that is exactly what it does to the stock biomass. The effect of landings exceeding MSY are apparent in the declining SSB after the mid 1990's. In fact, the terminal estimate from the assessment was the lowest in the time series and was only slightly above SSB msy ($SSB/SSB_{msy} 2011 = 1.29$). Over about a 20 year period the stock went from 2.5x SSBmsy to 1.3x SSBmsy. In real terms, this was a 53% decline in SSB. It is interesting that the decline in SSB initially starts during a time of relatively low landings and low F. This could perhaps be due to a series of poor year classes in the early to mid-1990's, as there is some recovery a few years later. Regardless, the decline in SSB has been consistent over most of the last 20 years, and was accelerated by the landings increase beginning around 2004. Given the terminal SSB estimates

and landings history of the last few years, it seems likely that overfishing will occur if landings on the order of those from 2004-2007 were to occur today.

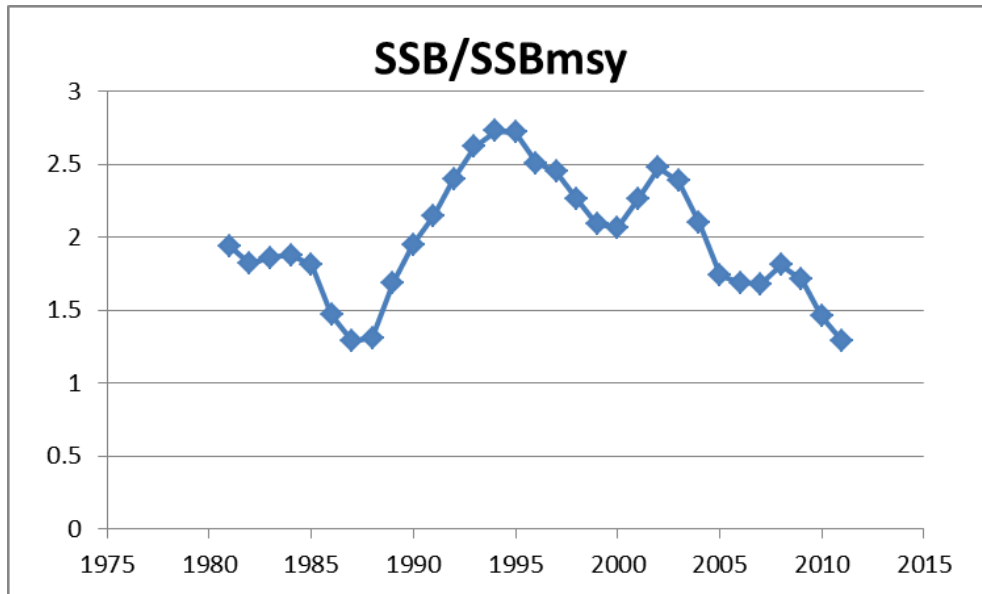


Figure 5. Spawning stock biomass relative to the MSY biomass reference for 1981-2011. SSB estimates are available farther back in time; this period was chosen to highlight the impact of landings during this time on SSB estimates.

Is there reason for concern and precaution with Cobia?

It appears so.

- Terminal assessment results indicate declining biomass and peak fishing mortality rates bumping up against the limits.
- Recreational landings for 7 of the last 12 years exceed the hypothetical recreational share (92%) of the equilibrium MSY (808,000 pounds).
- Landings have increased considerably in the last decade, with those from 2004 to 2014 twice those from 1992-2002.
- It seems unlikely that the APAIS calibration will have enough impact to resolve the ACL overage.
- Based on the use of landings relative to OFL as a measure of overfishing for years since the terminal assessment year, overfishing occurred in 2015.

Data Source Caveat

- Data used in this analysis to represent recreational landings in pounds and numbers are taken from a direct query of the MRIP website on February 4, 2015.
 - They do not include Wave 6 2015 although estimates since available show there were no wave 6 cobia landings
 - Headboat landings are not included
 - Weight values and mean weights derived here may not match information provided by SERO directly, due to different calculation of mean weight by SEFSC for the official ACL tracking database.



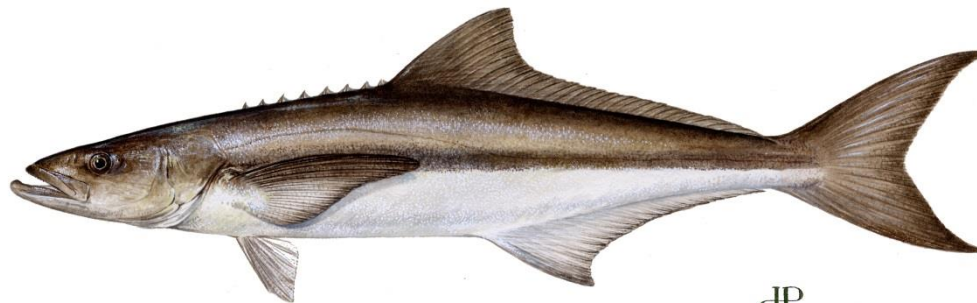
Atlantic Cobia Recreational Sector Update

Michael Larkin, Ph.D
LAPP/DM Branch
SERO

SAFMC Meeting
March 7-11, 2016

Management Changes

- In March 2015, Amendment 20B changed cobia ABC, ACLs, and ACTs based on SEDAR 28, but the AMs did not change.
- Following SEDAR 28, the Atlantic cobia stock is from New York through Georgia.



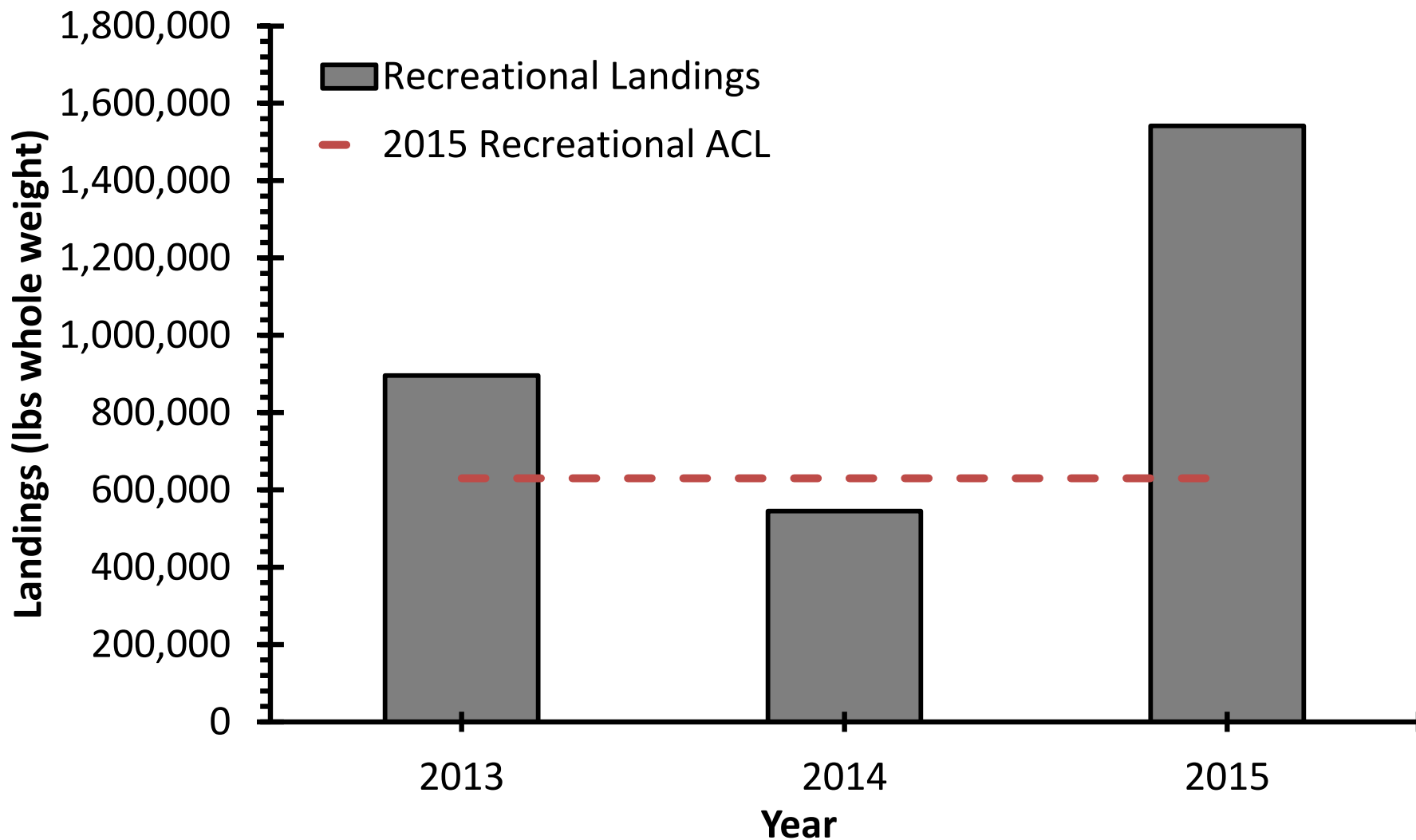
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COBIA

Rachycentron canadum

Atlantic Cobia Recreational Landings

(New York through Georgia)



* All 2015 data are preliminary

Details of 2015 Atlantic Cobia Recreational Landings by State

ATTACHMENT 3

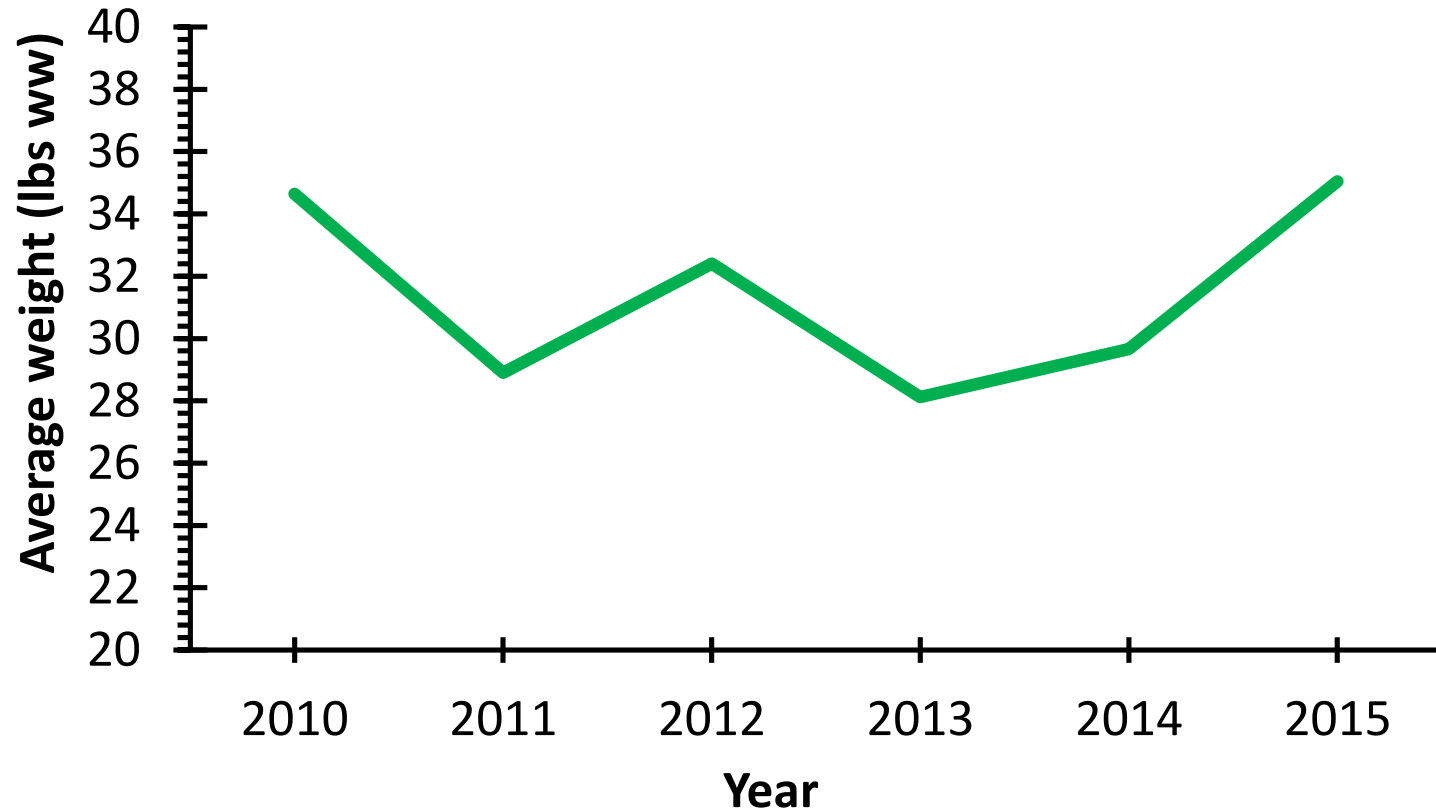
State	Landings (lbs)	% of 2015 Landings	PSE
VA	718,647	47	39
NC	631,006	41	29
SC	124,068	8	47
GA	67,814	4	75
Total	1,541,535	100	NA

Why were the Atlantic Cobia landings so high in 2015?

Average Atlantic cobia harvested per trip

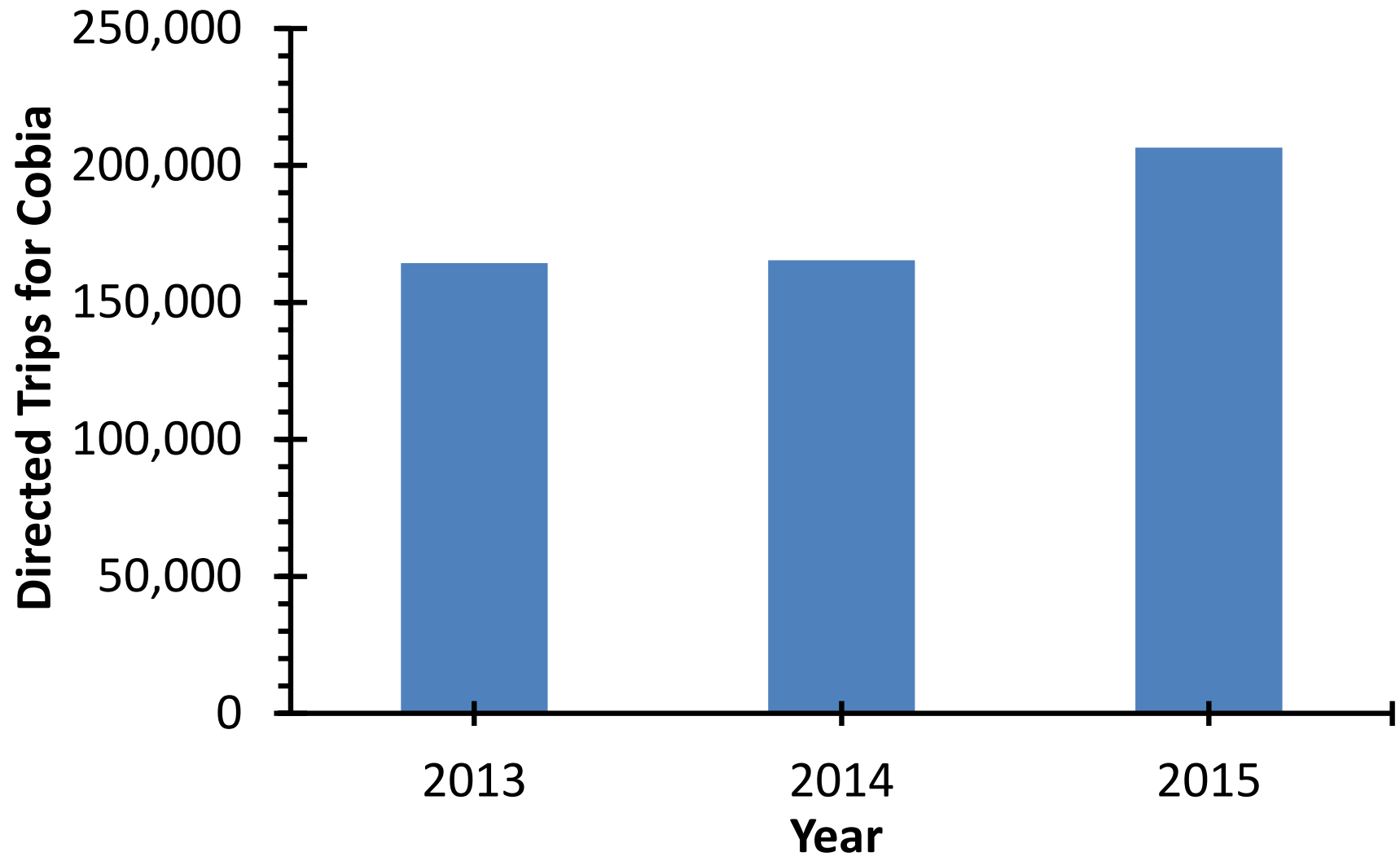
2014 0.512 cobia per person

2015 0.523 cobia per person



*All data are from New York through Georgia

Atlantic Cobia Targeted Fishing Effort (New York through Georgia)



- In 2011, Amendment 18 set the AM. If the recreational sector ACL and total ACL (commercial and recreational ACL) are exceeded then compare recreational landings to recreational ACL over a range of years. However, if ACL is changed then the first single year of landings will be compared to the recreational ACL.
- ACL was changed in 2015
- In 2015, both the recreational ACL and total ACL were exceeded

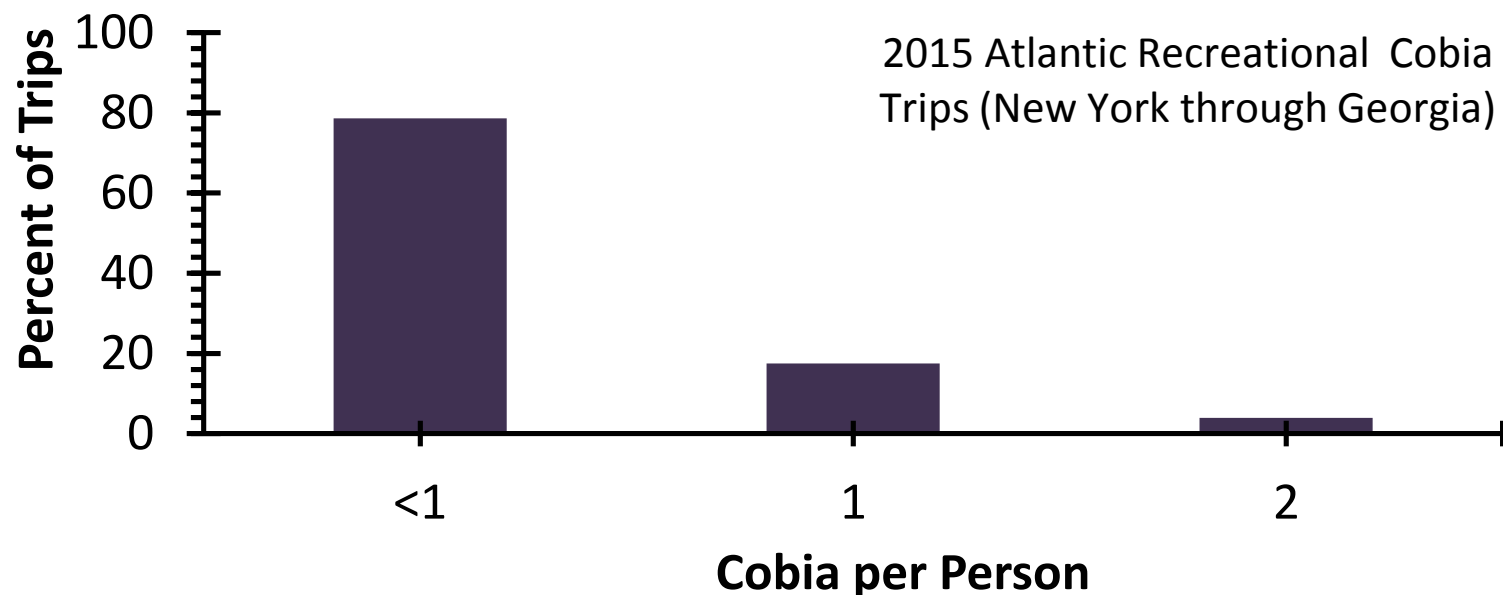
- AM requires the season to be reduced in 2016 based on projections when the landings will reach the ACT (500,000 lbs)
- Closure date dependent on what years are used to predict 2016 landings

Landings	Closure Date	NC 1 fish bag limit Closure Date
2013	27-Jun	29-Jun
2014	14-Aug	19-Aug
2015	31-May	1-Jun
Average 2013-2015	18-Jun	20-Jun
Average 2014-2015	14-Jun	16-Jun

Potential Bag Limit Changes

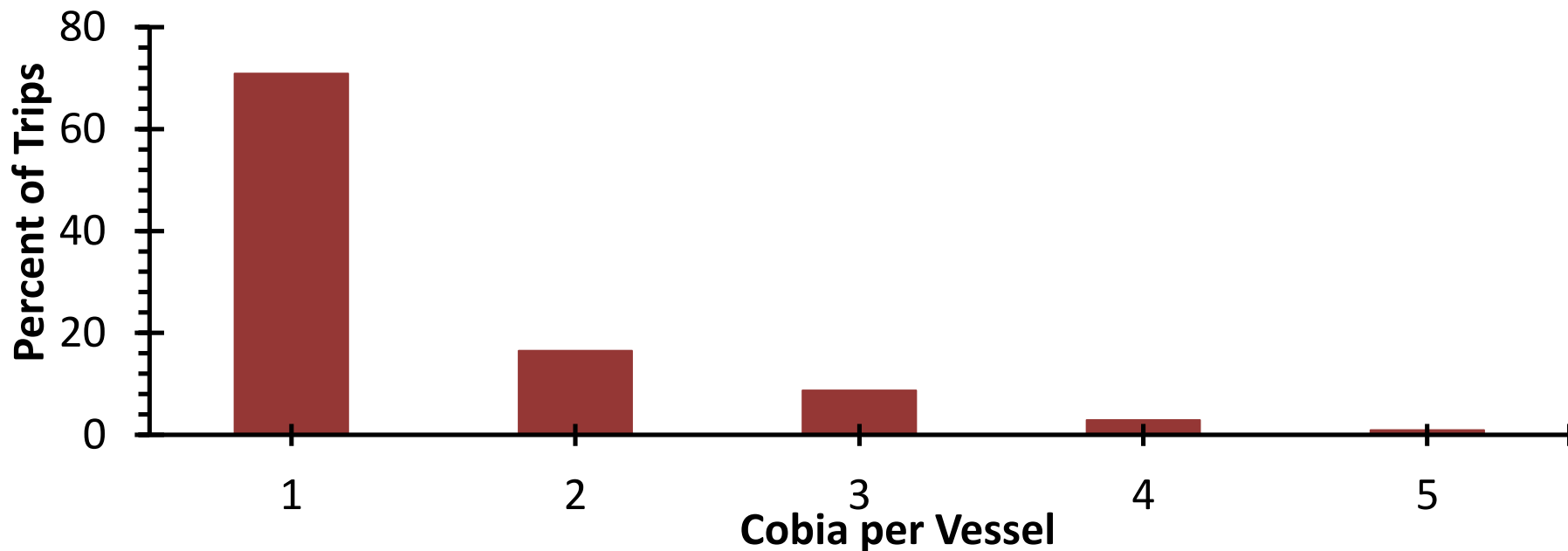
Bag Limit Change	Closure Date	Increase in Days
No Reduction in Bag Limit	18-Jun	-
NC Bag Limit Reduction to 1 Cobia per Person	20-Jun	2
NC, SC, GA Bag Limit Reduction to 1 Cobia per Person	21-Jun	3

*Closures based on average 2013-2015 landings



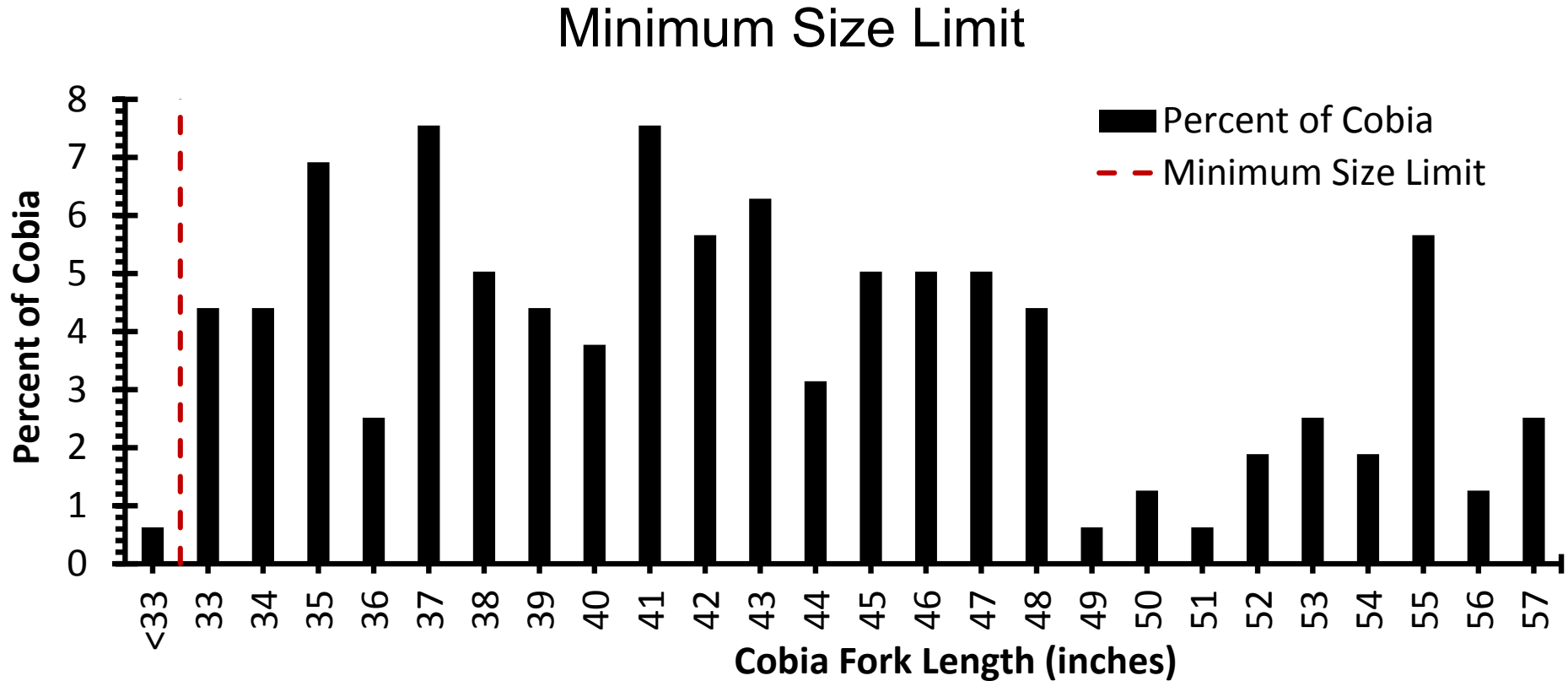
Other Management Options

Potential Vessel Limit



Data are from 2015 Atlantic Recreational Cobia Trips (New York through Georgia)

Other Management Options



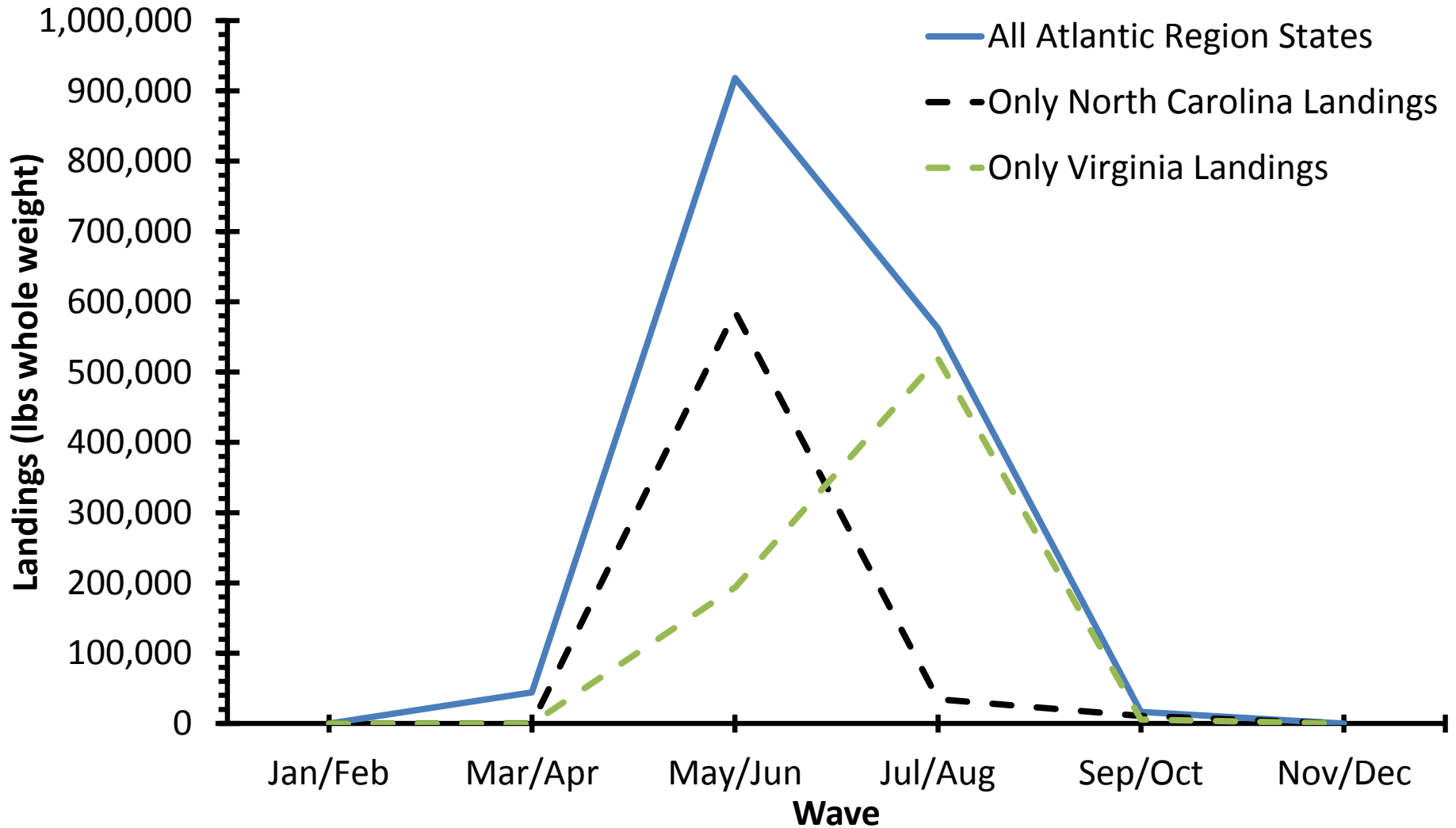
*100% of cobia are sexually mature at 31 inches fork length (SEDAR 28)

*Data are from 2015 Atlantic Recreational Cobia Trips (New York through Georgia)

QUESTIONS?

Details of 2015 Atlantic Cobia Recreational Landings

APPENDIX 1



*Data are from 2015 Atlantic Recreational Cobia (New York through Georgia)

Details of Atlantic Cobia Recreational Landings by State from 2013 through 2015

ATTACHMENT 3

State	2013 Landings		2014 Landings		2015 Landings	
	Landings (lbs)	% of Landings	Landings (lbs)	% of Landings	Landings (lbs)	% of Landings
VA	354,463	40	214,426	39	718,647	47
NC	492,998	55	277,846	51	631,006	41
SC	19,159	2	32,010	6	124,068	8
GA	29,304	3	20,670	4	67,814	4
Total	895,925	100	544,952	100	1,541,535	100

*Data are from Atlantic Recreational Cobia (New York through Georgia)

Details of 2015 Atlantic Cobia Recreational Landings by Mode

APPENDIX

Mode	2015 Landings	%
Shore	35,957	2
Private	1,400,457	91
Charter	102,948	7
Headboat	2,172	<1
Total	1,541,535	100

*Data are from 2015 Atlantic Recreational Cobia (New York through Georgia)

Details of 2015 Atlantic Cobia Recreational Landings by Jurisdiction

Mode	2015 Landings	%
Federal Waters	277,497	18
State Waters	1,261,865	82
Not Provided	2,172	<1
Total	1,541,535	100

*Data are from 2015 Atlantic Recreational Cobia (New York through Georgia)



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Dr. Michelle Duval, Chair | Charlie Phillips, Vice Chair
Gregg T. Waugh, Executive Director

March 23, 2016

The Honorable Robert J. Wittman
2454 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Your cobia letter dated March 18, 2016

Dear Representative Robert Wittman:

Thank you for contacting me about cobia and your concerns about the closure scheduled to begin on June 20, 2016. I am also concerned about the closure and the resulting impacts on fishermen from Georgia through New York, especially those from Virginia northwards who have access to cobia later in the year relative to the states in the South Atlantic.

First, let me review how we got to this point:

Cobia is managed jointly with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council through the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan (FMP). On the Atlantic Coast, cobia are managed through New York, and the Mid-Atlantic Council participates with 2 voting seats on the South Atlantic Council's Mackerel Committee that also addresses cobia. The Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), as amended, specifies that the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) set the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) and the Council sets the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) at a level that cannot exceed the ABC. The Reauthorized MSA also requires measures to limit each sector (recreational and commercial) to their ACLs and Accountability Measures (AMs) should those levels be exceeded. This removed all flexibility from the Councils regarding closures when the total ACL has been exceeded and AMs have been triggered.

Amendment 18 (implemented in January 2012) to the FMP established a Gulf Migratory Group and Atlantic Migratory Group of Cobia. The Atlantic Group ranged from the jurisdictional boundary between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils off Key West, Florida northwards to the boundary between the Mid-Atlantic and New England Councils (through New York). As required by the Reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act, Amendment 18 also established annual catch limits and accountability measures that will be triggered when the catch limits are exceeded in a fishing year. The annual catch limits are based on recommendations from the South Atlantic Council's scientific advisors (Scientific and Statistical Committee). Each sector is allocated a proportion of the total

annual catch limit. For Atlantic group Cobia, the recreational and commercial allocations are 92% and 8%, respectively.

The accountability measures to avoid commercial harvest of Atlantic Group Cobia exceeding the commercial annual catch limit includes an in-season closure when the commercial annual catch limit is met and a “pay-back” provision in which the subsequent year’s commercial catch limit is reduced. The pay-back provision is only triggered if the total (commercial + recreational) annual catch limit is exceeded as well.

The accountability measures for the recreational sector only occur post-season, and include a reduction of the length of the subsequent fishing year and a potential pay-back if the total annual catch limit is exceeded as well as the recreational catch limit. The length of the subsequent fishing year is determined by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Regional Administrator and is based on a moving average of recreational landings. Below is the language from Amendment 18 that established the catch levels and recreational accountability measures:

- Catch Levels (Florida Keys northwards through New York):
 - Annual Catch Limit (ACL) = Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) = Optimum Yield (OY) =
 - 1,571,399 pounds
 - Commercial ACL (8% of total ACL) = 125,712 pounds
 - Recreational ACL (92% of total ACL) = 1,445,687 pounds
- Accountability Measures (AMs)
 - Commercial - prohibit harvest, possession, and retention when the commercial ACL is met or projected to be met. All purchase and sale is prohibited. Commercial payback of any overage - Payback only if overfished & total ACL exceeded.
 - Recreational - If the recreational ACL is exceeded, the Regional Administrator shall publish a notice to reduce the length of the following fishing year by the amount necessary to ensure landings do not exceed the recreational ACL for the following fishing year. Compare the recreational ACL with recreational landings over a range of years. For 2011, use only 2011 landings. For 2012, use the average landings of 2011 and 2012. For 2013 and beyond, use the most recent three-year (fishing years) running average. If in any year the ACL is changed, the sequence of future ACLs will begin again starting with a single year of landings compared to the ACL for that year, followed by two-year average landings compared to the ACL in the next year, followed by a three-year average of landings ACL for the third year and thereafter. Only adjust the recreational season length if the Total ACL is exceeded. Recreational payback of any overage - Payback only if overfished & total ACL exceeded - If the recreational ACL is exceeded, the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries shall file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register to reduce the recreational ACL in the following year by the amount of the overage. The ACT would also be adjusted according to the ACT formula in Action19-6.

In 2013, the stock assessment for Atlantic Group Cobia (SEDAR 28) was completed. The assessment incorporated data through 2011. Additionally, new information used in the assessment indicated that the boundary between Gulf Group and Atlantic Group was not in the Florida Keys, but near the Georgia/Florida state line, i.e., the cobia on the east coast of Florida are part of the same stock of cobia in the Gulf of Mexico.

SEDAR 28 (Atlantic Group Cobia; completed in 2013 with data through 2011)

- Used new stock boundary based on genetic/tagging work (Georgia northwards through New York)

- Reviewed and approved by an independent peer review panel
- South Atlantic Cobia stock not overfished/not overfishing
- Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee accepted the assessment as appropriate for use in management and recommended fishing levels (ABC and Overfishing Level (OFL)) based on assessment projections.

Following the 2013 stock assessment, the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Councils, with input from the Mid-Atlantic Council, developed joint **Amendment 20B (implemented on March 1, 2015)**. This amendment updated the annual catch limits based on SEDAR 28 results and modified the management boundary between the Gulf Migratory Group and Atlantic Migratory Group of Cobia to align with the boundary used in the stock assessment. The east coast of Florida was allocated a proportion of the Gulf Group Cobia annual catch limit. The Atlantic Group Cobia annual catch limits were established in Amendment 20B as follows:

- Catch Limits (Georgia through New York):
 - Overfishing Level (OFL) = 760,000 pounds for 2015 and 730,000 in 2016 and beyond.
 - Annual Catch Limit (ACL) = Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) = Optimum Yield (OY) =
 - 690,000 pounds in 2015 and 670,000 pounds in 2016 onwards
 - Commercial ACL (8% of total ACL) = 60,000 pounds (2015) and 50,000 pounds (2016+)
 - Recreational ACL (92% of total ACL) = 630,000 pounds (2015) and 620,000 pounds (2016+)
- Accountability Measures (AMs) – no changes

Bottom Line:

- Recreational ACL decreased from 1,445,687 pounds (FL Keys-NY) to **630,000** ~~690,000~~ pounds (GA-NY) in 2015 based on new stock ID and SEDAR 28 ABC results
- Recreational catch = 1,540,775 pounds in 2015 = **129123%** over the Recreational ACL
- Accountability Measures triggered and recreational season for 2016 must be shortened to prevent exceeding the 2016 Recreational ACL of 620,000 pounds

Now I would like to talk about how we reduce the likelihood that this happens again:

Framework - The Council is working on a framework amendment that will include actions for vessel limits, increased minimum size limits, decreased bag limit, change of fishing year start date, modified recreational accountability measures, and a step-down for the commercial sector, and a request to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) to consider a joint management plan for Atlantic cobia. The Committee and Council approved the following motions for actions in the amendment that would apply to cobia management from Georgia through New York:

- Motion: Direct staff to look at vessel limits for 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 fish.
- Motion: Look at a combined recreational vessel limit decrease with increased minimum size limit.
 - 33-39 inches fork in 1-inch increments
 - 1-6 fish vessel limit.
- Motion: Look at a 1/person bag limit for cobia.
- Motion: Look at combined bag limit options with increased min size limit.

- 33-39 inches fork in 1-inch increments
- 1/person bag limit
- 2/person bag limit
- Motion: Direct staff to look at changing start of recreational fishing year to May 1.
- Motion: Explore modifying the recreational accountability measures:
 - If recreational landings, as estimated by the Science and Research Director, exceed the recreational ACL, then during the following fishing year, recreational landings will be monitored for a persistence in increased landings.
 - If necessary, the Regional Administrator shall publish a notice to reduce the length of fishing season and the recreational ACL in the following fishing year by the amount of the recreational overage, only if the species, or one or more species in a species complex, is overfished and the total ACL (commercial ACL and recreational ACL) is exceeded. The length of the recreational season and recreational ACL will not be reduced if the Regional Administrator determines, using the best scientific information available, that a reduction is unnecessary.
- Motion: For commercial Atlantic cobia sector, continue to fish at 2 fish per person until 75% of the commercial ACL has been caught, then decrease to 1 fish per person.
- Direction to staff: add options for dates after which a step-down would not occur.
- Motion: Draft a letter from the council to the ASMFC policy board to request consideration of joint management of Atlantic cobia.
- The Council's intent is to have new regulations in place prior to the start of the 2017 cobia fishing year.

Work with ASMFC

On behalf of the Council, I sent a letter to the ASMFC dated 3/18/16 requesting the Commission consider complementary management approaches for this fishery at its upcoming May 4, 2016 meeting (**Attachment 1**). I unfortunately have another commitment that day, but Gregg Waugh, SAFMC Executive Director, will be making a presentation to the ASMFC Policy Board on May 4th and he would be glad to meet with you and/or your staff to discuss cobia management. As noted in our letter, the Council believes the ASMFC process can provide the timely flexibility for each State to develop measures specific to its needs, while ensuring harvest does not exceed the target level for that State/region.

I know this response is long but the cobia issue is complex and I wanted you to know that we are doing everything we can to address this challenge. At our March 2016 Council meeting we received several presentations. John Carmichael, Deputy Executive Director for Science and Statistics, discussed cobia questions and answers that address a number of concerns about the cobia situation (**Attachment 2**). I would direct your attention to Figure 3 on page 6 of John's presentation showing the decline in the biomass compared to the biomass at maximum sustainable yield. Also, based on 2015 landings exceeding the overfishing level, overfishing occurred in 2015. These two factors urge caution in how we manage cobia to ensure that further declines in the stock biomass do not occur. The presentation (**Attachment 3**) by Mike Larkin, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, outlines the reason for the reduction in the 2016 season and the analysis to determine the length of the 2016 recreational season.

Finally, we are working through the SEDAR process to have a stock assessment update done as soon as possible. Cobia is not on the current SEDAR schedule and a stock assessment update is not likely to occur prior to 2018 or 2019.

Thanks again for contacting me and I know we will be talking again about cobia. If there is any additional information we can provide or if you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Gregg Waugh.

Best regards,

Michelle A. Duval

Michelle Duval
Chair

cc: Council Members & Staff
Eileen Sobeck
Bonnie Ponwith
Monica Smit-Brunello
Jack McGovern, Rick DeVictor & Sue Gerhart
Douglas Grout, Chair, ASMFC
John Bull, Commissioner, Virginia Marine Resources Commission



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Executive Committee

FROM: Management and Science Committee and the Assessment and Science Committee

DATE: April 25, 2016

SUBJECT: Changes to the Conservation Equivalency Guidance Document

ASMFC uses conservation equivalency in a number of interstate fishery management programs. Conservation equivalency (CE) allows states/jurisdictions (hereafter states) flexibility to develop alternative regulations that address specific state or regional differences while still achieving the goals and objectives of Interstate Fishery Management Plans (FMPs). A Conservation Equivalency Guidance Document was approved in 2004 to provide policy and technical guidance on the application of conservation equivalency in interstate fishery management programs developed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). This guidance document received limited implementation since its approval; therefore, current processes to establish conservation equivalency programs varies widely among species FMPs.

The Executive Committee tasked staff to review the guidance document to provide information on where there are inconsistencies with current applications and where additional clarification on process may be warranted. The guidance document is outlined in 5 major sections: General Policy Guidance, Standards for State Conservation Equivalency Proposals, Review Process, Coordination Guidance, and Public Perception. This document presents policy questions on specific sections of the document regarding guidance on development, submission, review, and approval of conservation equivalency proposals that were presented to and then considered by the Management and Science Committee (MSC) and the Assessment and Science Committee (ASC). Recommendations from the MSC and ASC were incorporated into this memo for Executive Committee review and consideration.

Section 1: General Policy Guidance

The general policy guidance section of the 2004 Guidance Document describes how the Plan Development Team (PDT) develops CE within an FMP, gives some direction on the length a program can be in place, and the committees the Plan Review Team (PRT) should see feedback from.

Policy Questions:

1) Charter Guidance: The ISFMP Charter allows for the use of CE in Commission management plans, unless the FMP specifically states it cannot be used. The general guidance section does not clearly describe Charter direction or the two ways in which conservation equivalency programs are utilized by states.

- Should the section be revised to clearly state the Charter guidance? Should it be revised to state through what process CE can be established: (1) FMPs (amendments or addenda) and (2) proposal submitted by the state?

ASC/MSC recommendation: Agreed with suggested change to reflect Charter guidance.

2) More Restrictive Measures: This section does not give direction to states when proposals are put forward for measures that are more conservative than a plan requires.

- Should the section be revised to clearly define when a CE proposal is required and when it is not? (e.g. Conservation equivalency proposals and Board approval are not required when states adopt more restrictive measures than those required in an FMP including but not limited to: higher minimum size, lower bag limit, lower quota, lower trip limit, closed or shorter seasons.)

Possible Language Change:

Conservation equivalency proposals and Board approval are not required when states adopt more restrictive measures than those required in the FMP (e.g., higher minimum size, lower bag limit, lower quota, lower trip limit, closed or shorter seasons). These changes to the management program should be included in a state's annual compliance report or state implementation plan.

ASC/MSC recommendation: Expressed concern over the difficulty in determining whether proposed measures are actually "more restrictive" due to unexpected consequences that may arise (e.g., a larger minimum size limit could increase discards). Recommend all CE proposals, regardless of the measures they propose, must be reviewed and considered by the board.

Section 2: Standards for Conservation Equivalency Proposals

This section of the Guidance Document intends to provide a template for states to follow when developing conservation equivalency proposals. Current practices are not reflected in this section.

1) Technical Committee (TC) Input: The original policy does not address that the TC may need to provide input to states regarding analysis and usable datasets prior to states submitting CE proposals.

- Should the guidance be revised to state the TC should determine a recommended level of precision for all data and analyses used in proposals unless previously determined by the management board or FMP? This information may be requested by the state prior to the submission of their proposal.

Possible Language Change:

The TC should determine a recommended level of precision for all data and analyses, unless previously determined by the board or FMP. States may request this information prior to the submission of their proposal.

ASC/MSC recommendation: Agreed with suggested change, with the clarification that states have the option, but are not required, to ask for TC input.

2) Implementation Timeframe: The Guidance Document states all proposals must include how long the equivalent measures will be in place. It also states the timeframe should be linked to the next assessment or expected collection of additional data. It states plans should sunset after 3 years unless justification is provided for a longer timeframe. Expiration of proposals is intended to provide periodic reviews. This guidance does not reflect current practice. CE timeframes are rarely linked to assessments or data collection in state proposals. Most often they either expire at the end of the fishing year or they do not have a set expiration date.

- Should the guidance be simplified to state all proposals should include the length of time the measures are intended to be in place and the timing of the reviews of the measures? This would remove the linking of the proposal timeframe to assessments and data collection.

Possible Language Change:

The proposal must include the length of time the state is requesting CE and a review schedule. If the state does not intend to have an expiration date for the CE program it should be clearly stated in the proposal with justification.

ASC/MSC recommendation: Agreed with suggested change, and requested the proposals identify the length of time measures are intended to be in place and the timing for reviews.

Section 3: Review Process

This section of the Guidance Document provides direction to states on timelines, the review process, and the approval process. The timeline guidance for proposal submission does not reflect current practice and some of the direction on what committees should review proposals is not clear. It is recommended the section header be revised to: *Review and Approval Process*.

1) Timing: The current guidance requires a state to notify the Board chair three months in advance of a Board meeting that they intend to submit a CE proposal. Completed proposals are then due two months prior to the Board meeting.

- Current practice provides more flexibility for the submission of CE proposals. Should the guidelines be changed to reflect current practice? Current practice allows the submission of proposals by the states at any time. The review of proposals submitted less than two months in advance of a board meeting is at the discretion of the Board Chair, while those submitted less than two weeks in advance are not considered at the upcoming board meeting. This practice is intended to allow a flexible submission schedule but still consider the workload of the committees reviewing the proposal.

Possible Language Change:

If a state is submitting a proposal outside of an implementation plan process, it must provide the proposal two months in advance of the next board meeting to allow committees sufficient time to review the proposal and to allow states to respond to any requests for additional data or analyses. States may submit conservation equivalency proposals less than two months in advance of the next board meeting, but the review and approval at the upcoming board meeting is at the discretion of the Species Management Board Chair. Proposals submitted less than two weeks before a meeting will not be considered for approval at that meeting.

ASC/MSC recommendation: Agreed with suggested change as described in the language above.

2) Committee Guidance: The Guidance Document does not provide clear advice on the distribution of CE proposals to committees. It first states, upon receipt of the proposal the PRT will determine what additional input will be needed from the Technical Committee, Law Enforcement Committee, the Committee on Economics and Social Sciences. This would indicate the PRT determines which committees should complete a review. The next sentence contradicts this advice by stating the PRT will distribute and make the proposal available to all committees for possible comment.

- Should the document be revised to clarify what committees should review the proposals? Under current practice, the PRT reviews the proposal and then determines which committees should review the proposal based on its content. The PRT then distributes the proposal to the necessary committees for review.

Possible Language Change:

Upon receipt of the proposal, the PRT will determine what additional input will be needed from: the Technical Committee (TC), Law Enforcement Committee (LEC), and Committee on Economic and Social Sciences (CESS). The PRT will distribute the proposal to all necessary committees for comment.

ASC/MSC recommendation: Agreed with suggested change to reflect current practice.

3) AP Guidance: Current guidance states committee reviews will occur before the AP reviews and comments on CE proposals, and that the AP will receive the other committees' reports. This is intended to give the Advisory Panel as much information as possible to aid in their recommendation to the Board. However, time constraints may not allow all committees to complete their reviews prior to the meeting of the AP.

- Should the guidance document be revised to account for possible time constraints? In general manner.

Possible Language Change:

The PRT will compile all of the input and forward the proposal and comments to the Advisory Panel when possible. However, when there are time limitations, the AP may be asked for comments on a proposal prior to completion of other committee reviews.

ASC/MSC recommendation: Agreed with suggested change, the AP may have to review the proposal before receiving other committees' reports due to time constraints.

4) PRT Recommendation: The current guidance requires the PRT to make a recommendation to the Board on approval, rejection, or conditional approval of CE proposals. However, in current practice, the PRT determines if the state's proposal is equivalent to the measures contained in the FMP. In addition, the Guidance Document does not require the PRT to evaluate whether the proposal follows this policy document.

- (1) Should the guidance document be revised to reflect current practice? It has been the responsibility of the board to determined approval, rejection, or conditional approval of CE proposals.
- (2) When the PRT reviews CE proposals, should the review indicate whether a state's CE proposal followed the guidance document?

Possible Language Change:

The PRT will forward to the Board the proposal and all committee reviews, including any minority reports. The PRT will provide comment on whether the proposal is or is not equivalent to the standards within the FMP.

The PRT reviews should address whether a state's proposal followed the CE standards outlined in this policy, and any additional specifications included in the FMP.

ASC/MSC recommendation:

- 1) Agreed with suggested change and clarification, the Board determines approval, rejection, or conditional approval.
- 2) Agreed with suggested change. Commented that CE proposals should follow the guidance document and deviation will be highlighted by the PRT.

5) Implementation Timing: Under the current guidance, conservation equivalency programs are encouraged to be implemented at the beginning of the fishing year. Specific guidance on implementation timing may not be necessary.

- Under current practice the Board sets implementation dates for CE programs upon review and approval of CE proposals. Should the document be revised to reflect this practice?

Possible Language Change:

The Board will decide whether to approve the conservation equivalency proposal and will set an implementation date through final action.

ASC/MSC recommendation: Recommended implementation timing should be requested in the original state CE proposal. The Board will then set an implementation date for CE proposals when considering them for final action, taking into account the requested implementation date.

6) Review Timeline: The current Guidance Document establishes a timeline by which the Board will review CE plans. It states the Board designates that all CE plans will be reviewed at one meeting per year. The Board does not need to establish a specific meeting to review conservation equivalency because the timing for review and approval of conservation equivalency proposals is already addressed in this policy and is not consistent with this guidance of one meeting per year.

Should this language be deleted from the guidance document?

Language to be Deleted:

Where applicable, the Board should develop a schedule for each species to designate one meeting per year to address conservation equivalency plans. When a board cannot meet in a timely manner, and at the discretion of the Board and Commission Chair, boards may have the ISFMP Policy Board re-approve conservation equivalency plans.

ASC/MSC recommendation: Agreed with suggested deletion. The Board does not need to designate a meeting to review CE proposals because they already have established a review timeline in Section 3.1 above.

Section 4: Coordination Guidance

This section of the Guidance Document discusses the considerations states should take into account when conservation equivalency proposals impact coordination of management with federal partners. The current document does not include US Fish and Wildlife Service as one of those partners.

- While management changes from US Fish and Wildlife Service are less frequently necessary than other federal partners, they do occur. Should US Fish and Wildlife Service be added to the document?

ASC/MSC recommendation: Agreed with suggested change to add US Fish and Wildlife Service.

DRAFT

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

**CONSERVATION EQUIVALENCY:
Policy and Technical Guidance Document**



Drafted – April 27, 2004

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide policy and technical guidance on the application of conservation equivalency in interstate fisheries management programs developed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The document provides specific guidance for the states, species management boards, and the technical support groups to follow during the development and implementation of fishery management plans, amendments, or addenda; as well as guidance on development, submission, review, and approval of conservation equivalency proposals.

Background

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) employs the concept of conservation equivalency in a number of interstate fishery management programs. Conservation equivalency is used to allow states a degree of flexibility in developing regulations to address specific state or regional differences while still achieving the goals and objectives of ASMFC management programs. Given that the species managed by ASMFC cross many state boundaries, it is often difficult to develop one-size-fits-all management measures, which necessitates the need to use conservation equivalency.

Conservation equivalency is currently defined in the Interstate Fisheries Management Program (ISFMP) Charter as:

“Actions taken by a state which differ from the specific requirements of the FMP, but which achieve the same quantified level of conservation for the resource under management. One example can be, various combinations of size limits, gear restrictions, and season length can be demonstrated to achieve the same targeted level of fishing mortality. The appropriate Management Board/Section will determine conservation equivalency.” The application of conservation equivalency is described in the document Conservation Equivalency Policy and Technical Guidance Document

In practice, the ASMFC frequently uses the term “conservation equivalency” in different ways depending on the language included in the plan (see appendix 1). For example in the Tautog FMP, conservation equivalency is used in the broadest sense, in that all states were required to achieve a 29% reduction in fishing mortality with no specific options listed in the document. In the Summer Flounder FMP, each state is required to achieve a state-specific reduction using the table and methodology developed annually by the Management Board. The Striped Bass FMP establishes a 2 fish bag limit and a 28-inch minimum size standard for the coastal recreational fishery, however states can vary these measures if it can be demonstrated that the potential recreational harvest will be equivalent to harvest that would have occurred under the standard measures in the plan.

Due to concerns over the lack of guidance on the use of conservation equivalency and the lack of consistency between fishery management programs, the ISFMP Policy Board accepted a recommendation from the Management and Science Committee and formed a sub-committee to address conservation equivalency. This sub-committee was charged

with developing a workshop to “develop options and recommendations for improving the use and effectiveness on conservation equivalency in Commission fishery management plans”. This workshop was held on October 17, 2001 and provided definite recommendations for refining the application of this management tool.

Based on the results of the workshop another sub-committee was formed comprised of commissioners and representatives from technical committees, the Law Enforcement Committee, the Management and Science Committee, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Committee on Economics and Social Sciences. The recommendations included in this document were developed by this sub-committee during meetings on December 3-4, 2002 and December 3, 2003. These recommendations will be reviewed and approved by the Management and Science Committee and ISFMP Policy Board.

General Policy Guidance

Conservation equivalency is a tool the ASMFC uses frequently to provide the states flexibility in developing and implementing regulations to achieve the goals of interstate fisheries management programs. The use of conservation equivalency will continue to be an integral part of the Commission management process.

During the development of a management document the Plan Development Team (PDT) has the responsibility to recommend if conservation equivalency should be permitted for that species. The board should provide a specific determination if conservation equivalency is an approved option for the fishery management plan, since conservation equivalency may not be appropriate or necessary for all management programs. The PDT should consider stock status, data availability, range of the species, socio-economic information, and the potential for more conservative management when stocks are overfished or overfishing is occurring when making a recommendation on conservation equivalency. During the approval of a management document the Board will make the final decision on the inclusion of conservation equivalency.

If conservation equivalency is determined to be appropriate, the conservation equivalency process should be clearly defined and specific guidance should be supplied in the fishery management documents. Each of the new fishery management plans, amendments, or addenda should include the details of the conservation equivalency program. The guidance should include, at a minimum, a list of management measures that can be modified through conservation equivalency, evaluation criteria, review process, and monitoring requirements. If possible, tables including the alternative management measures should be developed and included in the management documents. The development of the specific guidance is critical to the public understanding and the consistency of conservation equivalency implementation.

The states have the responsibility of developing conservation equivalency proposals for submission to the Plan Review Team (see standards detailed below). Upon receiving a conservation equivalency proposal the PRT will initiate a formal review process as detailed in this guidance document. The state submitting the conservation equivalency

proposal has the obligation to ensure proposed measures are enforceable. If the PRT has a concern regarding the enforceability of a proposed measure it can task the Law Enforcement Committee with reviewing the proposal. Upon approval of a conservation equivalency proposal, the implementation of the program becomes a compliance requirement for the state. Each of the approved programs should be described and evaluated in the annual compliance review and included in annual FMP Reviews.

The management programs should place a limit on the length of time that a conservation equivalency program can remain in place without re-approval by the Board. Some approved management programs may require additional data to evaluate effects of the management measures. The burden of collecting the data falls on the state that has implemented such a conservation equivalency program. Approval of a conservation equivalency program may be terminated if the state is not completing the necessary monitoring to evaluate the effects of the program.

The Plan Review Team (PRT) will serve as the “clearing house” for approval of conservation equivalency proposals. All proposals will be submitted to the PRT for review. The PRT will have the responsibility of collecting all necessary input from the technical committee, Law Enforcement Committee, and Committee on Economics and Social Sciences. The PRT will compile input from all of the groups and forward a recommendation to the management board. Review and input from the Advisory Panel will also be forwarded to the board.

Standards for state conservation equivalency proposals

Each state that is seeking to implement a conservation equivalency program must submit a proposal for review and approval. It is the state’s responsibility to supply the necessary information and analysis for a complete review of the proposal. The following section details the information that needs to be included in each proposal. Proposals that include an excessive number of options may delay timely review by the PRT and other groups and may ultimately delay the report to the Board. The states should limit the number of options included in a proposal or prioritize the options for review.

1. The proposal must include rationale on why or how an alternate management program is needed in the state. Rationale may include, but are not limited to, socio-economic grounds, fish distribution considerations, size of fish in state waters, interactions with other fisheries, protected resource issues, and enforcement efficiency.
2. Each proposal must include a description of how the alternative management program meets all relevant FMP objectives and management measures (FMP standards, targets, and reference points). This description must include necessary analyses to quantify the effects of the alternate management program. The analyses should be based on the most recent Board approved stock assessment. There should be sufficient information included in the proposal for the Plan

Review Team to review the proposal without additional documentation or explanation.

3. Each proposal must include a description of available datasets used in the analysis, description of how the data are collected, detailed description of state level data collection programs, and information on sampling targets/sample distribution/CV/post-stratification/etc. The proposal should also describe limitations of data and any data aggregation. All the landings data used should have a set level of precision as determined by the Technical Committee. The species technical committee should develop data standards for other types of data that may be used in a conservation equivalency proposal. Any states that do not meet the approved precision standards should conduct sensitivity analyses to determine the effects of the uncertainty in the data.
4. The proposal must include the length of time the state is requesting conservation equivalency. The timeline should be linked to the next assessment update or the expected collection of additional data. The timeline should be consistent with plan horizon with a maximum of 3 years (sunset) unless justification is provided for a longer period of time or an indefinite period of time is requested. A state can resubmit an updated proposal following the expiration and the board can re-approve the alternate measures. The expiration of conservation equivalency programs is intended to provide periodic reviews of alternate plans to ensure they are consistent with the relevant plan objectives.
5. Each proposal must justify any deviations from the conservation equivalency procedures detailed in the FMP. The state should conduct analyses to compare new procedures to procedures included in the plan, as appropriate, including corroborative information where available.
6. Each proposal should include a plan for follow-up and monitoring of potential impacts of the conservation equivalency proposal. This plan should include a description of the process that will document the results from a conservation equivalency measure relative to the FMP requirements and the annual reporting requirements. This proposal must provide a monitoring schedule to evaluate the effectiveness of a conservation equivalency program.

Review Process

Implementation of new amendments/FMPs should include timelines and a review process for conservation equivalency proposals. However, the review process and timeline needs to be established for all conservation equivalency proposals that are submitted outside of the implementation of a new management document.

The following is a list of the steps and timelines for review and approval of conservation equivalency proposals. Any deviations from the following process should be included in the plan/amendment.

1. Conservation equivalency should be approved by the Management Board and, where possible implemented at the beginning of the fishing year.
2. A state must declare the intent to submit a conservation equivalency proposal to the species board chair three months prior to the a scheduled ASMFC meeting week. The state will then be required to submit the proposal to the board chair two months prior to the meeting week. The board chair will then submit the proposal to the Plan Review Team (PRT) for review.
3. The PRT should notify the state that the proposal is complete.
4. Upon receipt of the proposal the PRT will determine what additional input will be needed from the Technical Committee, Law Enforcement Committee, the Committee on Economics and Social Sciences. The PRT will distribute and make the proposal available to all committees for possible comment. The review should include a description of the impacts on or from adjoining jurisdictions or other management entities (Councils and/or NMFS). If possible this description should include qualitative descriptions addressing enforcement, socio-economic issues and expectations from other states perspective (shifts in effort). The review should highlight efforts to make regulations consistent across waterbodies. The PRT will compile all of the input and provide a recommendation for approval of the proposal to the management board.
5. The PRT will compile all of the input and forward the proposal and comments to the Advisory Panel. The Chair of the Advisory Panel (AP) will compile the AP Comments and provide to the Management Board.
6. The PRT will provide the following type of recommendations – approval, rejection, or conditional approval. The PRT should provide rationale for the recommendation, including improvements that could be made if the proposal was rejected. The report to the board should include the input provided by all the committees that were consulted by the PRT. Any minority reports that were developed should also be forwarded to the board. If possible the PRT should identify potential cumulative effects of all conservation equivalency plans under individual FMPs (e.g. impacts on stock parameters).
7. The management board will review and take action on the proposal. Board action should be based on the PRT recommendation as well as other factors such as impacts to adjoining states and federal management programs. A schedule should be developed for each species to provide one scheduled meeting per year to address conservation equivalency plans, where applicable. When a board cannot meet in a timely manner and at the discretion of the board and Commission Chair, the boards have the option to have the ISFMP Policy Board approve the conservation equivalency plan.

8. The PRT will evaluate whether the measures implemented under a state conservation equivalency plan are in compliance as part of the annual compliance review. The PRT will also evaluate whether the state conservation plan meets the goals of the species FMP. The board will determine if modification of the state conservation equivalency plan is required.

Coordination Guidance

The Commission's interstate management program has a number of joint or complementary management programs with NOAA Fisheries and the Fishery Management Councils. Conservation equivalency creates additional burden on the Commission to coordinate with our federal fishery management partners.

The Commission's FMPs may include recommendations to NOAA Fisheries for complementary EEZ regulations. Conservation equivalency measures may alter some of the recommendations contained in the FMPs, which would require that the Commission notify NOAA Fisheries of any changes. The Commission needs to consider the length of time that it will take for regulations to be implemented in the EEZ and try to minimize the frequency of requests to the federal government.

The protocol for NOAA fisheries implementing changes varies for the different species managed by the Commission. The varying protocols need to be considered as conservation equivalency proposals are being developed and reviewed.

When necessary for complementary management of the stock, the ASMFC Chair will request federal partners to consider changes to federal regulations may be required.

Public Perception

A lack of public understanding of the conservation equivalency process has led to a perception that some states are allowed to implement regulations that are less restrictive than the standards in the plan. The public has also expressed concern over not fully understanding how conservation equivalency management options are developed.

The development of this document is the first step in helping the public better understand conservation equivalency. Another important step to foster public understanding is the inclusion of management options in Commission FMPs and Amendments. If the public has access to the options that the states can select from, a major source of confusion is eliminated. Also, the public should be informed that conservation equivalency does not change the allocation between jurisdictions included in the plan.

The states need to work with the fishing public to better describe conservation equivalency and provide an explanation of why a state's regulations may differ from their neighbors.

Conservation Equivalency Subcommittee membership:

Stu Kennedy (Chair)
Rob O'Reilly
Harry Mears
Anne Lange
Bill Goldsborough
Pete Jensen
Kathy Hattala
Doug Grout
Ernie Beckwith

Bruce Buckson
Paul Caruso
Joe Fessenden
John Carmichael
Vishwanie Maharaj
Melvin Shepard
Byron Young
Steve Doctor

APPENDIX 1

The following appendix details the management measures for each ASMFC managed species that can be modified through conservation equivalency. This appendix also includes a summary of the management measures that the states have developed and are currently implemented through conservation equivalency.

Note: This document is a summary of the conservation equivalency measures and procedures included in ASMFC fishery management plan. It does not supercede any of the language included in the plans.

American Eel

The American Eel FMP states: "With approval of the American Eel Management Board, a state may vary its regulatory specifications listed in Section 4, so long as that state can show to the Board's satisfaction that the goals and objectives of this FMP will still be met." Section 4 of the FMP includes the Management Program Implementation, therefore a state can modify any provision included in the FMP through conservation equivalency.

Current Measures Implemented

No states have altered the management measures through conservation equivalency.

American Lobster

Amendment 3 to the FMP for American Lobster outlines the adaptive management limitations for lobster management. The Amendment states that the following measures cannot be altered through conservation equivalency:

- Prohibition on possession of berried or scrubbed lobsters
- Prohibition on possession of lobster meats, detached tails, claws or other parts of lobster
- Prohibition on spearing lobsters
- Prohibition on possession of V-notched female lobsters
- Requirement for biodegradable "Ghost" panel for Traps
- Minimum Gauge Size
- Limits on Landings by fishermen using gear or methods other than traps

Any lobster management measure that is not listed above may be modified through conservation equivalency.

Current Measures Implemented

New Hampshire: The Lobster Management Board approved a New Hampshire program that allows a portion of their Area 1 fishermen 1,200 traps and the rest

600 traps rather than the 800 trap allocation for everyone as specified in Addendum III.

Massachusetts: The Lobster Management Board approved a Massachusetts program for the Outer Cape Cod which uses 1999 through 2001 as qualifying years to identify potential participants and allocates traps based on fishing performances during 2000 and 2002 with pounds as the qualifying parameter. The Outer Cape Cod plan in Addendum III used 1999 through 2000 as the qualifying years and fishermen reported catch reports as the qualifying parameter.

New Jersey: The Lobster Management Board approved a New Jersey conservation equivalency proposal allowing New Jersey to implement an alternative permitting and trap allocation system then what was outlined in Addendum I.

Atlantic Croaker

There is no mention of Conservation Equivalency in the 1987 FMP for Atlantic croaker.

Current Measures Implemented

Conservation equivalency is not applicable to Atlantic croaker management.

Atlantic Herring

Under Addendum II to the Atlantic Herring FMP the states are permitted to alter any measure for which a compliance criteria is in place provided that approval is obtained prior to implementation. The compliance measures that are included in the plan are:

- Report, annually, the amount harvested by fixed gears in state waters
- Provide a description of the operation and amount of fish mealed in conjunction with herring processing activities
- Enact spawning restrictions
- Prohibit landings when TAC has been attained in an area or sub-area
- Prohibit directed fishing for herring in state waters when the TAC has been attained in an area or sub-area
- Prohibit landing to IWPs when harvested from a closed area or sub-area
- Daily fixed gear landings be reported on a weekly basis
- Provide an annual report on any mealing activity in the state

Current Measures Implemented

No states have altered the management measures through conservation equivalency.

Atlantic Menhaden

Amendment 1 provides states the opportunity to request permission to implement an alternative to any mandatory compliance measure. States submitting alternative proposals must demonstrate that the proposed action will not contribute to overfishing of the resource. All changes in state plans must be submitted in writing to the Board and to the Commission either as part of the annual FMP Review process or the Annual Compliance Reports.

Current Measures Implemented

No states have altered the management measures through conservation equivalency.

Atlantic Striped Bass

Amendment 6 allows for the use of conservation equivalency in the management of striped bass. States/jurisdictions are permitted to modify recreational minimum size limits and bag limits to remain consistent with the 2 fish at 28-inch minimum standard in the plan. The commercial minimum size can also be decreased with a corresponding decrease in commercial quota. The plan states that the minimum size limits cannot be implemented below 18-inches.

Current Measures Implemented

Maine:	Recreational Fishery	1 fish 20”-26” or over 40”; no 2 nd fish
New York:	Hudson Recreational	1 fish 18, 24 or 26 inches w/ or w/out spawning closure
Maryland:	Coastal Comm. Fishery	24 inch min size limit;
	reduced quota	
North Carolina:	Albemarle/Roanoke Rec	18 inch minimum size limit
	Albemarle Commercial	18 inch minimum size limit

Atlantic Sturgeon

Amendment 1 to the Atlantic Sturgeon Fishery Management Plan does not provide for conservation equivalency.

Current Measures Implemented

Conservation equivalency is not applicable to Atlantic sturgeon management.

Black Sea Bass

The Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan does not provide for conservation equivalency.

Current Measures Implemented

Conservation equivalency is not applicable to Black sea bass management.

Bluefish

The Bluefish Fishery Management Plan does not provide for conservation equivalency.

Current Measures Implemented

Conservation equivalency is not applicable to Bluefish management.

Horseshoe Crab

The Horseshoe Crab Fishery Management Plan does not provide for conservation equivalency.

Current Measures Implemented

Conservation equivalency is not applicable to Horseshoe crab management.

Northern Shrimp

Amendment 1 to the Northern Shrimp Fishery Management Plan does not provide for conservation equivalency

Current Measures Implemented

Conservation equivalency is not applicable to Northern shrimp management.

Red Drum

Amendment 2 to the Red Drum FMP allows any state to request permission to implement an alternative to any mandatory compliance measure. States submitting alternative proposals must demonstrate that the proposed action will not contribute to overfishing of the resource. All changes in state plans must be submitted in writing to the Board and to the Commission either as part of the annual FMP Review process or the Annual Compliance Reports.

Current Measures Implemented

No states have altered the management measures through conservation equivalency.

Scup

Addendum XI to the Scup Fishery Management Plan provides the details for conservation equivalency in the 2004 recreational fishery. This Addendum also allows the Board to establish annual conservation equivalency procedures through future Board action. Under Addendum XI, the states from Massachusetts through New York must

develop a combination of size limits, bag limits, and seasonal closures to achieve a state-specific reduction. The states from New Jersey through North Carolina must implement minimum size limits, seasonal closures, and bag limits as described in the Addendum. Conservation equivalency is not permitted in the commercial fishery.

Current Measures Implemented

The states from Massachusetts through New York have implemented measures that achieve the necessary reduction for their recreational fisheries in 2004.

Shad and River Herring

Amendment 1 to the Shad and River Herring FMP allows a state to vary their recreational and commercial management programs so long as that state can show to the Board's satisfaction that the target fishing mortality rate or the overfishing definition will not be exceeded. Also, Amendment 1 states that alternative management regimes may also include other indices of their equivalency (e.g., eggs-per-recruit, yield-per-recruit, etc.), in addition to fishing mortality protection. States shall submit proposals for altering their regulatory program for American shad, hickory shad, or river herring prior to implementing any changes.

Current Measures Implemented

No states have altered the management measures through conservation equivalency.

Spanish Mackerel

There is no mention of Conservation Equivalency in the 1990 FMP for Spanish mackerel.

Current Measures Implemented

Conservation equivalency is not applicable to Spanish mackerel management.

Spiny Dogfish

The Interstate FMP for Spiny Dogfish allows the states to submit a proposal and receive Board approval to change any compliance requirement in the FMP. The compliance requirements included in the FMP are:

- Must close state waters when the quota is harvested
- Required to report landings weekly to NMFS
- State permitted dealers must report weekly
- Implement possession limits that comply with the annual specifications
- State issued exempted permits for biomedical harvest, limited to 1,000 fish (must report in annual compliance report)
- State prohibition of finning

Current Measures Implemented

No states have altered the management measures through conservation equivalency.

Spot

There is no mention of Conservation Equivalency in the 1987 FMP for spot.

Current Measures Implemented

Conservation equivalency is not applicable to Spot management.

Spotted Seatrout

There is no mention of Conservation Equivalency in the 1984 FMP for Spotted seatrout

Current Measures Implemented

Conservation equivalency is not applicable to Spotted seatrout management.

Summer Flounder

The Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board annually establish the process for applying conservation equivalency to the summer flounder recreational fishery. Each year the Board establishes state-specific targets (numbers of fish) that the states must achieve through combinations of minimum size limits, bag limits, and seasonal closures. Conservation equivalency is not permitted in the commercial summer flounder fishery.

Current Measure Implemented

All of the states have developed proposals and are currently implementing regulations that are consistent with the 2004 state-specific targets.

Tautog

Addendum III to the Tautog FMP required each state to make a 29% reduction in fishing mortality (25% reduction in exploitation rate) in the recreational fishery by April 1, 2003. States were required to submit proposals for this reduction and all proposals were reviewed and approved by the TC, the AP, and the Board.

Current Measures Implemented

All of the states have implemented approved measures to achieve the reduction that is required under Addendum III.

Weakfish

Amendment 3 to the Weakfish FMP required states to achieve a 32% reduction in the weakfish exploitation rate (F) from the 1990-1992 reference period. This level of reduction was carried over into Amendment 4. Appendix I of Amendment 4, an updated Evaluation Manual (O'Reilly 2002), provides states guidance in establishing their reduction plans. A state has the ability to adjust its commercial fishery regulations and choose from several creel limit/minimum size combinations for its recreational fishery to achieve the 32% reduction.

To achieve the fishing mortality reduction, states' commercial fisheries are constrained by size limits, gear restrictions, and possibly seasonal and area closures. Amendment 4

established a minimum size in the recreational fishery of 12 inches total length. However, it also provided states with a pre-determined suite of conservation equivalencies for recreational fishery regulations. States may choose a minimum size and creel limit combination of 12 inches/7 fish, 13 inches/8 fish, 14 inches/9 fish, or 15+ inches/10 fish.

Current Measures Implemented

All states regulate their commercial fisheries using combinations of minimum fish and mesh sizes and closed seasons to achieve the required reduction. The states have also implemented a combination of recreational minimum size limit and bag limits that are consistent with Amendment 4.

Winter Flounder

The current plan, states do not have to comply with any specific requirements. Therefore, conservation equivalency is currently not applicable for winter flounder. Amendment 1 is in development and will contain compliance criteria and the Board will decide which of these are available to change through conservation equivalency.

Current Measures Implemented

Conservation equivalency is not applicable to winter flounder management.

APPENDIX 2

Current Plan Review Team Membership

American Eel Plan Review Team

Herb Austin (VA)
Mel Bell (SC)
Dan Kuzmeskus (USFWS)
Lydia Munger (ASMFC)
Vic Vecchio (NY)
Gail Wippelhauser (ME)

American Lobster Plan Review Team

Richard Allen (RI)
Clare McBane (NH)
Dan McKiernan (MA)
Bob Ross (NMFS)
Carrie Selberg (ASFMC)
Carl Wilson (ME)

Atlantic Croaker Plan Review Team

Herb Austin (VA)
Wilson Laney (USFWS)
Tina Moore (NC)
Harley Speir (MD)
Nancy Wallace (ASMFC)

Atlantic Herring Plan Review Team

Megan Gamble (ASMFC)
David Libby (ME)
Clare McBane (NH)
William Overholtz (NMFS)

Atlantic Menhaden Plan Review Team

Matt Cieri (ME)
Ellen Cosby (VA)
Trisha Murphey (NC)
Douglas Vaughn (NMFS)

Atlantic Striped Bass Plan Review Team

Megan Gamble (ASMFC)
Wilson Laney (USFWS)
Gary Shepherd (NMFS)

Atlantic Sturgeon Plan Review Team

Kim McKown (NY)
Tom Meyer (NMFS)

Ted Smith (SC)
Brad Spear (ASMFC)
Dick St. Pierre (USFWS)

Black Sea Bass Plan Review Team

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Nancy Butowski (MD)
Toni Kerns (ASMFC)
Chris Moore (MAFMC)

Bluefish Plan Review Team

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Herb Austin (VA)
Vic Crecco (CT)
Louis Daniel (NC)
Toni Kerns (ASMFC)
Najih Lazar (RI)
Chris Moore (MAFMC)
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Horseshoe Crab Plan Review Team

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Stewart Michels (DE)
Eric Schrading (USFWS)
Brad Spear (ASMFC)

Northern Shrimp Plan Review Team

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Dan Schick (ME)
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Red Drum Plan Review Team

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Michael Murphy (FL)
Lee Paramore (NC)
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Scup Plan Review Team

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Beth Burns (NC)
Bill Figley (NJ)
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Shad and River Herring Plan Review Team

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Spanish Mackerel Plan Review Team

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Spiny Dogfish Plan Review Team

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Spot Plan Review Team

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Spotted Seatrout Plan Review Team

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Summer Flounder Plan Review Team

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MEMORANDUM

April 21, 2016

To: Tautog Management Board
From: Ashton Harp, FMP Coordinator
RE: Draft Amendment 1 Update

The following provides additional information on key issues within Draft Amendment 1, specifically how a stock assessment update will impact the Draft Amendment 1 timeline and next steps for the commercial harvest tagging program.

2016 Tautog Stock Assessment Update

A tautog stock assessment update was added to the ASMFC stock assessment schedule, which will be presented for approval at the ISFMP Policy Board meeting. The inclusion of a 2016 stock assessment update was discussed at the February Tautog Board meeting, however a decision was deferred in order to present this option to the Tautog Technical Committee (TC) and Stock Assessment Sub-Committee (SAS). After review of the available data the TC and SAS recommend an update, which will include data through 2015. This represents an additional two years of data that was not available for the benchmark stock assessment. The TC believes the recent data could provide insight on the effects of the management restrictions put in place in 2012, as a result of Addendum VI.

The Long Island Sound (LIS) and New York/New Jersey regional assessments (Table 2) are currently underway and will also include data through 2015. These stock assessments will be completed this summer and results presented at the August Board Meeting.

The 2016 stock assessment update will include the Massachusetts/Rhode Island region, the Delaware, Maryland, Virginia region, and possibly the Connecticut, New York, New Jersey region depending upon the Board's preferred regional configuration (Table 1 or Table 2).

M16-37

Regional Management Options the Board is Considering:

Table 1: Three Region Approach
1) Massachusetts–Rhode Island
2) Connecticut–New Jersey
3) Delaware–Virginia

Table 2: Four Region Approach
1) Massachusetts–Rhode Island
2) Long Island Sound (Connecticut–New York)
3) New York–New Jersey (excluding LIS)
4) Delaware–Virginia

Impacts on the Draft Amendment 1 Timeline

Adding a stock assessment update will impact the timeline for Draft Amendment 1. However, the delay will be minimal. The SAS expects to complete the stock assessment update in time for the November Board meeting. A comparison of the timeline with and without the stock assessment update is provided below—both estimate a 2017 completion date for Draft Amendment 1. It is likely new management measures would not go into effect until January 1, 2018 for either timeline.

Timeline A: Draft Amendment 1 with regional assessments for LIS and NY/NJ; no stock assessment update

Stock Assessment Data:

- LIS and NY/NJ assessments will include data through 2015
- All other regions will use the results of the benchmark stock assessment, which includes data through 2013

Jan-May 2016	Long Island Sound stock assessment (UConn)
April-May 2016	NY/NJ assessment, excluding LIS (Tautog SAS)
June-July 2016	TC and peer review of LIS and NY/NJ assessment report
Aug 2016	Board reviews peer-reviewed LIS and NY/NJ assessments; Board chooses one management region alternative (Table 1 or 2)
Aug-Oct 2016	TC catch reduction analysis; PDT further develops options
Nov 2016	Draft Amendment 1 is presented to the Board for public comment approval
Winter 2016	Draft Amendment 1 public comment/hearings
Feb 2017	Board reviews public comments and considers final approval of Draft Amendment 1

Timeline B: Draft Amendment 1 with regional assessments for LIS and NY/NJ + stock assessment update

Stock Assessment Data:

- Each regional assessment will include data through 2015

Jan-May 2016	Long Island Sound stock assessment (UConn)
April-May 2016	NY/NJ assessment, excluding LIS (Tautog SAS)
May 2016*	Policy Board approves the stock assessment update
June-July 2016	TC and peer review of LIS and NY/NJ assessment report
Aug 2016	Board reviews peer-reviewed LIS and NY/NJ assessments; Board chooses one management region alternative (Table 1 or 2)
Aug-Nov 2016*	Stock assessment update (Tautog SAS)
Nov 2016*	Board reviews the stock assessment update results
Nov 2016-Jan 2017	TC catch reduction analysis; PDT further develops options
Feb 2017	Draft Amendment 1 is presented to the Board for public comment approval
Spring 2017	Draft Amendment 1 public comment/hearings
May 2017	Board reviews public comments and considers final approval of Draft Amendment 1

** Blue text highlights the additional steps necessary to complete a stock assessment update*

Commercial Harvest Tagging Program

The Law Enforcement Sub-Committee (sub-committee) will meet in mid-May to discuss the commercial harvest tagging program. Staff will present tags ranging from lip tags, button tags and cable ties from vendors including Tyden Brooks, Cambridge Seals, QC supply, National Band, and Floy. Preferred tags will be identified and the sub-committee will establish next steps which may include the initiation of a live fish trial to test preferred tags. In addition, staff will present comments from individual commercial fishermen interviews on topics including live tagging and market dynamics. A report on the commercial harvest tagging program activities and findings will be presented at the August Board meeting.