



Atlantic Mackerel Fishery Performance Report

July 2023

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Mackerel-Squid-Butterfish (MSB) Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar to review the Longfin Squid and Atlantic Mackerel Fishery Information Documents and develop Fishery Performance Reports. Separate reports were created for each species/fishery. The primary purpose of the report is to contextualize catch histories for the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) by providing information about fishing effort, market trends, environmental changes, and other factors. AP member comments are not consensus or majority statements – the summary below may represent the perspective of one or multiple AP members. Some staff follow-up information has been added and noted where applicable.

Advisory Panel members present: Dan Farnham Jr, Eleanor Bochenek, Emerson Hasbrouck, Greg DiDomenico, Jeff Kaelin, Katie Almeida, Meghan Lapp, Pam Lyons Gromen, Peter Kaizer, and Robert Ruhle

Others present: Jason Didden, Peter Hughes, Mark Holliday, Alissa Wilson, BB, Brad Schondelmeier, Carly Bari, Hannah Hart, Jessica Blaylock, Maria Fenton, and Mark Binsted.

Trigger questions posed to the AP to generate discussion:

1. What factors have influenced recent catch (markets, environment, regulations, etc.)?
2. Are the current fishery regulations appropriate? How could they be improved?
3. What would you recommend as research priorities?
4. What else is important for the Council to know?

Market/Economic Conditions

Mackerel demand has been strong for years – markets have not been a limiting factor. Persistent inability to supply product consistently will eventually lead to market problems for the U.S. industry.

Environmental Conditions

Nothing particularly unusual was reported; there are few reports of fish from more southern areas.

Management Issues

The New England Fishery Management Council's (NEFMC) inshore mid-water trawl buffer zone affected landings when in operation – the buffer zone started February 2021 and ended (court order) March 29, 2022. It was noted that the NEFMC is revisiting buffer zones.

The lack of herring RSA quota has limited mackerel landings later in the year in recent years – but trawl boats are allowed to catch herring in the third trimester in area 1A which does allow trawled herring/mackerel catch.

Horsepower restrictions, and resulting speed limitations, may be affecting the size of the fish that the commercial fishery can catch (larger fish are faster); also possible research topic.

An 89 MT river herring and shad (RH/S) cap would have substantially impacted mackerel landings in 2023 at the observed RH/S interaction rates early in the year. An 89 MT RH/S cap would also have degraded the estimation protocols in terms of getting enough observer trips to use representative in-season data. (Staff note: the fishery looked likely to close earlier this year due to the RH/S cap before additional observer data reduced the RH/S cap ratio and cap estimates.)

A lower RH/S cap may have incentivized a change in 2023 behavior, making it hard to predict what might have happened in 2023 at a lower RH/S cap in terms of potential closures.

The criticism of the mackerel fishery has made the creation of a fishery performance report moot – in the current situation we can't catch the quota we have, and therefore can't provide fishery-dependent information which will increase assessment uncertainty.

Other Issues

Recreational catch and its precision and impact on biomass remain a concern. There was discussion regarding the 29% drop (totals of 10.7 million fish to 7.6 million fish) in mackerel catch from 2021 to 2022 after relative stability from 2018-2021. Follow-up examination of MRIP estimates indicates that while catches declined across private/rental boat modes in Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire (this group accounts for most mackerel catch each year), about 2/3 of the total decline occurred in the Massachusetts private/rental boat mode group. The numbers of angler trips for this estimate stayed about the same, so angler effort does not appear to have been the cause of the decline in catch. For the Massachusetts' private/rental boat mode estimates, observed harvests (MRIP type As) were similar in 2021 and 2022 with most of the decline represented by lower rates (catch per angler trip) for *reported but not observed harvests* (MRIP B1s) and *reported discards* (MRIP B2s). There was also discussion whether state permitting may shift some reported catch from the recreational sector to the commercial sector, but that should only potentially affect 2023 and future catches.

The potential use of size limits and US-Canada alignment remains a concern. The bulk of use of the available mackerel quota should be dedicated to more selective gear (e.g. purse seining).

With Industry-Funded Monitoring in the Herring Fishery suspended, we also get less mackerel observer coverage to support RH/S cap monitoring. The program was suspended due to the inability of the Agency to pay for its portion of the program. The current observer case at the Supreme Court may impact the ability of the Agency to require industry-funded observer coverage outside of the North Pacific (which is also revenue capped), foreign fishing, and/or

limited access privilege programs (aka ITQs). It's regrettable that the voluntary bycatch avoidance program is no longer in operation – the program was important re: RH/S avoidance. It's worth exploring potentially using Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) modifications to direct more observer coverage to fleets relevant for RH/S.

Research Priorities

Research priorities were reviewed, but no related input was provided.

Additional Public Input:

No additional input was provided.