

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: July 22, 2020
Subject: Consent Agenda: Federal Consistency – Atlantic King Mackerel Commercial Vessel Limit

Purpose:

Obtain approval of a federal consistency action that would keep Atlantic state king mackerel commercial vessel limits consistent with limits in adjacent federal waters.

Why:

Maintaining consistent commercial vessel limits between state and federal waters will reduce regulatory confusion and provide greater opportunities for the commercial fishery to harvest its quota.

Top Points:

- 1) The Atlantic king mackerel commercial fishery occurs in state and federal waters, and FWC rules for king mackerel commercial harvest mirror regulations in adjacent federal waters.
- 2) The commercial fishery has under-harvested the quota assigned to the fishing zone off east Florida by an average of 43 percent in the last three fishing years.
- 3) An increase to the federal Atlantic king mackerel commercial vessel limit is expected to take effect this fall.
- 4) This change is supported by Florida's commercial king mackerel industry.

Affected Parties:

The proposed action would affect people who commercially harvest king mackerel in Florida, as well as commercial seafood dealers, processors, and retailers.

Summary:

In late 2019, the South Atlantic Council approved an increase of the federal commercial vessel limit for king mackerel fishing during October through February, following requests from east Florida commercial fishermen. The new limit has been approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and is expected to take effect in federal waters by Oct 1, 2020. The larger vessel limit may allow individual commercial fishing trips to be more economically feasible and improve the ability of the commercial fishery to harvest their quota with minimal risk of an in-season closure.

The proposed federal consistency action would update the reference to federal commercial vessel limit in FWC's Atlantic king mackerel rule to refer to the new federal vessel limit when implemented, ensuring state and federal vessel limits continue to be consistent.

Staff Recommendation:

Approve the federal consistency action to maintain consistent Atlantic king mackerel commercial vessel limits between state and federal waters. If approved, staff will follow the process for adoption of federal standards provided by section 120.54(6), Florida Statutes.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management