

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: March 20, 2017
Subject: Consent Agenda: King Mackerel (Federal Consistency)

Purpose:

This is a federal consistency action to amend state rules to be consistent with pending changes for king mackerel in adjacent federal waters.

Summary:

The Gulf and South Atlantic councils recently approved commercial and recreational changes to king mackerel regulations based on stock assessment results and scientific analysis that indicate catch limits may be increased and regional management zones should be revised. These federal changes have been approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and will take effect in spring 2017.

There are two stocks of king mackerel in the southeastern U.S.: a Gulf stock and an Atlantic stock. These stocks are jointly-managed by the Gulf and South Atlantic councils in federal waters through several regional management zones. During the winter, these stocks co-occur in the same area off Florida (commonly referred to as the “mixing zone”). Within the mixing zone, king mackerel has historically been managed with seasonal boundaries and regulations unique to this area. Historically, the Gulf and Atlantic king mackerel stocks were believed to mix along most of the east coast of Florida and Florida Keys. However, recent data indicate that these stocks only mix in a relatively small area off the Florida Keys.

In response to this information, the Gulf and South Atlantic councils approved regulations that establish a new, year-round management boundary between the Gulf and Atlantic stocks at the Monroe—Miami-Dade county line. The councils also approved changes that would increase commercial and recreational quotas; modify Atlantic commercial vessel limits and seasons at the request of the commercial industry; allow king mackerel caught as bycatch in certain commercial fisheries in the Atlantic to be sold; and increase the Gulf recreational bag limit to allow the recreational sector to harvest more of their quota. These changes were largely supported by recreational and commercial harvesters because they increase access to the resource and promote longer fishing seasons.

The proposed rule amendments would make FWC’s king mackerel rules consistent with pending federal rules by (1) revising management boundaries, (2) streamlining commercial fishery regulations while also promoting longer fishing seasons, and (3) increasing the recreational bag limit in the Gulf of Mexico and Monroe County. These changes are expected to ease compliance with and reduce fishermen’s confusion about regulations, and allow commercial harvesters and recreational anglers greater access to king mackerel without jeopardizing the sustainability of the stock.

Staff Recommendation:

Approve the following changes to state king mackerel regulations to be consistent with pending federal rules:

- Revise the management boundary between the king mackerel fishery in state waters of the Gulf of Mexico (known in FWC rules as the Gulf-Atlantic fishery) and the fishery in state waters of the Atlantic Ocean to be the Monroe—Miami-Dade county line year-round. Outdated rule language pertaining to the Gulf-Atlantic fishery's Eastern Region and Western Region would be removed.
- Modify and streamline the language for king mackerel commercial vessel limits to clarify that commercial harvesters in state waters are subject to federal commercial vessel limits applicable in adjacent federal waters.
- Clarify that king mackerel legally harvested in federal waters by the commercial fishery may be sold.
- Increase the king mackerel recreational bag limit from two to three fish per person for state waters in the Gulf of Mexico and Monroe County.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

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