

### **Mackerel Summary Information Meeting 2 – Close to 100 Identifiable Participants**

The chat pod was not active for this meeting. Some Q & A pod content may have been lost, but it was not as extensively used in this meeting compared to Meeting 1. Staff is investigating if that content can be recovered.

Staff Responded to a variety of clarification questions during the call. Questions staff set aside for follow up included:

1. Final destination of exports?
2. Detailed information on egg survey?

Comments (Q&A not summarized unless part of comments)

*Captain Greg Sears:*

40+ years fishing Mass Bay/EEZ/and Canada. Every year mackerel are in different places and cycle. Temperature makes a big difference and is rising. Last summer water reached 80F. From 2010 on effort has been dropping – affects how you assess the assessments. Driggers and trawlers have been closing down. Scituate fleet is down from 20 to 4. Low catch rates are due to less effort – it's too expensive to not be able to fish groundfish, though some vessels have been able to be successful with mackerel. You are doing too much assuming – it's a slap in the face. Mother nature creates balance. Groundfish limitations could be tied to egg trends. Offshore, it's extremely difficult to assume where fish may have spawned. Also see lots of variation in Canada where biomass is. In Mass Bay this year, Stellwagen Bank, the backside of the Cape, and Race Point/Long Point all had huge mackerel biomass – biomass moves around. Western Stellwagen has 75'-100' thick for 8 miles. Effort with trawlers and bigger boats has gone away – they can't afford to just wait for mackerel – they require multiple types of fisheries. You say biomass is increasing but don't project it exponentially the next five years rather you show that it slows down – that seems off. MSA requires fair and equitable. You need economic impacts to ensure fair and equitable treatment including secondary effects related to support services. Impacts on a single community will be higher than the entire ex-vessel value of commercial mackerel. Closing the EEZ will create hardship for a lot of people. Some recreational effort is a little different can go inside the EEZ for mackerel. You need to also consider other closed fisheries, temperature, oxygen, weather, and where catch occurs. I've never had anyone ask me where I'm catching my mackerel. And they rarely are at the docks so it's not representative. You need to consider economic effects and effort. You are relying too much just on the catch and not considering effort. The MSA fair and equitable provision means you need to have good knowledge about economic effects. RE: closing the EEZ for mackerel – consider impacts on communities and support services, all the way to airlines given where people travel from for this fishery. Also thinking about my sons and the next generation coming in. 20% of mackerel fishing coming from the shore is not realistic. I will put some effort into providing economic information and effort information. I hope you listen to me; you should at least study for another year. Your recruitment and biomass has gone up and I think you are even low balling it. A lot of party/charter captains don't know you need to report all mackerel caught, and dockside intercepts focus on the main species and only ask about other species half the time. All tuna fisherman are using live mackerel at times. Same for striped bass.

*Peter Fallon:*

Charter Captain in Maine and President of the ME Assoc of Charterboat Captains. Why were state surveys not used? [staff: from the assessment: "Due to the infrequent occurrence of mackerel or the limited geographic range of the surveys compared to the range of the mackerel stock during that season, trawl surveys other than the NEFSC spring bottom trawl survey were removed from further

consideration.”] Why is the NEFSC trawl survey down-weighted? [staff: The model diagnostics (root mean square errors) indicated that the Albatross survey was not reflecting the trends in the stock when compared to performance of the other data inputs]. Reports from our Assoc members indicate high abundance. Mackerel are critical bait for striped bass and tuna and also provide shore opportunities and are the bread and butter species for some captains. There is a disconnect between the catch/mackerel availability and Council representation. The states most impacted will not have a vote in determining a fair and equitable solution. Working with recreational and for hire operators throughout the assessment process could improve the accuracy and buy-in from fishermen. The 100% discard mortality assumption for rec discards undermines stakeholder faith even if it doesn’t matter that much statistically. Same for the static natural mortality. Are we researching if we could have mackerel rebuild but not back fill into historical range due to changing ocean conditions? To make meaningful contributions we need context for measures – e.g. bag limits and/or seasonal closure options – you would need to work with the states and it needs to be done in advance of public hearings.

*Captain Donnie Burke:*

Previous speakers captured issue well. I think your data is completely flawed and inaccurate. The approach you are taking is not leaving much room for other options. There are other ways you can limit – e.g. measuring fish or only keeping a certain amount in the livewell. There are other ways to help while we get a better sense of the data. When you have 100% of the people giving you the same “anecdotal data” it’s probably actual data and the way you are getting data must be inaccurate. The 3” mesh is a great idea for commercial. Cutting off access to mackerel is an asinine approach. The number of fish that die after being in the livewell is next to none. Please interview the major captains to figure out another way to allow use of mackerel for live bait and also not have a detrimental effect on the mackerel stock.

*Captain Barry Gibson:*

NE Director for the Recreational Fishing Alliance here in Maine and have run a charter boat in Maine for 51 years. Asked for confirmation that commercial ex-vessel value is \$3-\$5 million [staff: yes]. Do you know where these mackerel go? [staff: commercial exports can be examined – countries vary by year]. People would like to know what goes on with these exported mackerel. What is the recreational value of mackerel including related to for-hire bait? Needs to be available before public hearings. Confirmed that there is no resource sharing with Canada. I fish mid-Coast Maine and this fall I have never seen as many mackerel up in the bays – miles and miles. Are the spatial shifts in the stock? There’s no shortage in my area for mackerel – they are easy to catch and more than in years.

*David Schalit:*

Problems with the egg survey and MRIP are critical. The dockside queries for example, you can add what other fish did you catch also for bait. We need a precautionary approach with the data we see as problematic. The amount of recreational-caught mackerel you are estimating is staggering and gives one pause. Of the alternatives you mentioned, the one that makes the most sense to me is the one that has a 50% chance of rebuilding in 10 years with around 6,000 MT of US catch. Although it may be a longer rebuilding period, it will have less negative effects. The range of this fish, the southern range was highly productive in previous years but very few data points now. The Gulf of Maine is now the most productive place. If we maintain harvest levels for the Jan-March fishery, we’re doing nothing to consider restoring some of the productivity we’ve had in the past. Why would we whack these fish so hard early in the year when we consider the next event is the May spawning. That defies logic. We need to use a scalpel not a baseball bat. With economic analysis, NMFS HMS GARFO looked at fishery catch data and success rate for at least one medium/large/giant tuna – about 900 vessels/year in 2019. These are either GenCat or for-hire with sale endorsement. That’s the whole Northeast. (Not NC). By 2021

probably more – this gives you a sense of the scale. All are using mackerel for bait at times – a key component. Then there are also the unsuccessful boats. There's not data for these vessel re: mackerel that get used for bait.

*Rich Wood:*

President of the Cape Cod Charter Boat Association and have run a charter out of Provincetown for about 15 years. The Association submitted comments. The previous speakers have all made good points. Prohibiting mackerel in the EEZ would dramatically affect the for hire fleet – it's a black and white situation. It's what will happen in short term and longer as customers fade away. Need to consider enforcement – who's going to check possession? There are 100s of boats out there – it would be ridiculous. We need to protect livelihoods and the participants.

*Keith Bobrowiecki:*

I'm a recreational fisherman out of Casco Bay, ME. If the recreational fishermen like me have macks shut down and we go to menhaden, they don't survive in the livewell as well – most will snag them with 100% mortality. I target sharks catch and release and not having macks for bait will create an unintended impact on another resource. Impacts to rec guys – consider I'm putting a boat purchase on hold because of this action.

*Mike Delzingo:*

In regards to egg surveys. All the data stopped in 2019 or earlier. The trawl survey was increasing. Landings and revenues have been increasing. Yet you are putting a huge weight and too much weight on the egg survey. The egg surveys seem like the contradiction. Is all the egg survey information available for scrutiny? [staff: will check] Other data and on the water reports seem to show the opposite of the egg survey. With shifting temperatures maybe Canada needs to do more surveys – mackerel may be moving to avoid predators expanding into their egg survey area. Requested more info on how lengths are recorded – staff described. From 2014 to 2019 the stocks tripled. We're missing two years of data since 2019. With an upward trend these heavy restrictions seem like the wrong thing to do.

*Bailey Bowden:*

I'm a recreational fisherman from downeast Maine and have a 16-ft skiff with an outboard motor. 100 % of the fish I catch (<1 mile out) are consumed by family and friends. This in an aspect of this fishery no one has commented on but a lot of people in Maine eat mackerel fresh/smoked/salted/pickled/canned as a resource for the winter. People who are poor who depend on these fish for sustenance you are driving them into welfare or theft because it's one less opportunity to feed themselves. Asked about written comment opportunities – staff described. It seems like from 1970s to present the recreational fishing has taken a miniscule portion of catch/population. There was once a huge pie. The commercial fishery has decimated the stock by overfishing the last 30 years. The recreational fishery has been a sustainable fishery for the last 50 years. A 50% cut to the recreational catch/guess doesn't seem either fair or equitable.

*Tim Cruso:*

From Marshfield MA. Reiterate other speakers points. There seems to be flawed science. It's unbelievable the amount of mackerel in Cape Cod Bay everywhere I go. It amazes me. I'm a lobster fisherman and I see them stuck in the lobster traps regularly. Port sampling skews data to offshore fishery – when I get bait from them the size is drastically smaller what I see locally. Be as conservative as possible when it comes to cuts and hope the science catches up. Hopefully rebuilding time shortens when you get a better handle on stock. Cutting recreational sector isn't reasonable for reasons already

stated. Small part of quota, many released alive or used as sustenance. Reasonable use of resource. Need additional northern representation w/Council – doesn't make sense to have Mid-Atlantic Council bullying northern states where stock had moved.

*Jack Patrician:*

For-hire and commercial fisherman in Gloucester. Folks have talked about MRIP interviews – I get interviewed frequently and they ask about bait and disposition. Wondering why I get interviewed so much. I talk to the interviewers and they said some marinas don't let them in so wondering if anything can be done to spread out interviews. Staff referenced MRIP FAQs on MRIP site. For years and inches on mackerel – how are they shrinking? Where's data on larger fish – we might catch 1000 larger mackerel a day. I got involved in hook and line mackerel – regular paycheck – we see lots of big fish. When they are spawning they might not hit jigs as well – more sustainable than net fishery.

*Pete Kaizer:*

On MSB AP. With cod we thought they spawned at 19" but then later found out they don't really spawn well until 22". Maybe same with mackerel? Are there still survey tows in historic areas? [staff: yes] Are mackerel benthic or broadcast spawners? There's a lot of confusion with the egg survey. And MRIP. We're not there yet, maybe another year. At the end of the day probably only 15%-20% discard mortality. A cautionary approach would be a size and/or bag limit so we avoid loading the boat but still can use some for bait. Would be fair and equitable and hopefully all quotas can rebound.

*John Parkhurst:*

Will the economic impact of for-hire fishing (\$600 million) be factored against reductions among the sectors. [staff: will describe fishery values, may be limited in how any particular reduction in mackerel translates into losses] It sounds like the algorithm of fair and equitable has not been decided yet. Are you considering a size limit? [staff: not currently]

*Rob Savino:*

Tuna charter fisherman and on Stellwagen Bank Charter Assoc. I talk to a lot of folks and you are getting a good sense of people's concerns the last couple of days. The egg assessment seems to be the biggest questionable red flag – it's the catalyst. I've taken MREP and am familiar with the science. It's possible that the random survey bongo info is not giving correct information and you are putting a lot of faith in it. I agree with all the other comments regarding potential detrimental economic effects. There are other ways to figure this out other than closures and the recreational impact is small. With the dockside samples, they are a small part of the assessment but they are very wrong if being used to determine overall stock size.

*Captain Jeff Fontes:*

Agree with other folks – huge economic impacts. We're a commercial operation – straddle rec/commercial. Not being able to catch mackerel in the EEZ would be devastating. I've been questioned at the dock – I can't imagine it's that accurate. Most of the bait I catch is returned. I report my mackerel on VTRs, but many won't have to or don't know. Why can't pure recreational fishermen report? It's 2022 – we can use our phones. It will be better data. We're being told the stock has tripled but we can't catch them. I had the opportunity to fish Stellwagen – I've never seen more mackerel. You couldn't get to the bottom to catch a herring without picking up 6 mackerel across sizes. Getting that catch data in real time would be helpful to get real data. We want to see all our fisheries do well for our livelihoods.