



## **Atlantic Mackerel Fishery Performance Report July 2021**

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Mackerel-Squid-Butterfish (MSB) Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar on July 7, 2021 to review an Atlantic mackerel Fishery Information Document and develop the following Fishery Performance Report. 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. The trigger questions below were posed to the AP to generate discussion. The AP was also asked about preliminary thoughts on potential rebuilding modifications given the recent mackerel assessment. Please note: The AP comments described below are not necessarily consensus or majority statements.

**Advisory Panel members present:** Jeff Kaelin, Sam Martin, Emerson Hasbrouck, Daniel J Farnham, G. Lovgren, Gerry O' Neill, Katie Almeida, Pam Lyons Gromen, Zack Greenberg, Greg DiDomenico, and Meghan Lapp.

**Others present:** Jason Didden, Doug Christel, Aly Pitts, Dave Secor, David Stormer, Alissa Wilson, Paul Rago, and Mark Holliday.

### **Trigger questions:**

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?

### 1.1 General

Concern was voiced that shifting thermal habitat suitability is impacting the distribution and/or productivity of MSB species, and needs to be taken into account by assessments/management.

There is concern that assessments will be hurt if surveys are limited by wind development.

Concern was voiced about the potential effects of data gaps (surveys, observer, etc.) due to COVID-19.

Tariffs affect prices and profitability, and therefore trade. If a buyer is in China, that buyer may try to negotiate price based on what they know they will have to absorb in tariffs.

The costs of importing/exporting containers from/to overseas has increased (doubled in cases) and will likely be a factor going forward for quite some time.

## 1.2 Mackerel

### Market/Economic Conditions

In 2020 spring fish disappeared before COVID-19 effects were substantially affecting fishing. 2021 landings would also have been impacted by uncertainty around Covid – all fisheries have been fragile and participants have worked to ensure the market is not flooded by multiple vessels landing at one time.

There are two very different markets – fresh and frozen. Export demand has been fairly steady. The fresh market has been more negatively impacted by Covid.

Given low herring quotas, prices may have been somewhat elevated just to keep boats going.

### Environmental Conditions

See point above in general section about shifting thermal habitat. Mackerel availability continues to be highly variable and hard to predict year to year.

### Management Issues

The RH/S cap had substantial negative impacts on the mackerel fishery in 2018/2019. There are discrepancies between New England and the Mid-Atlantic that can hamstring the mackerel fishery (especially given it's a high-volume fishery), while substantial RH/S cap remains in the Atlantic herring fishery.<sup>1</sup>

Fall 2020 – lack of Atlantic herring RSA restricts northern late-season mackerel landings in areas 3/1a.

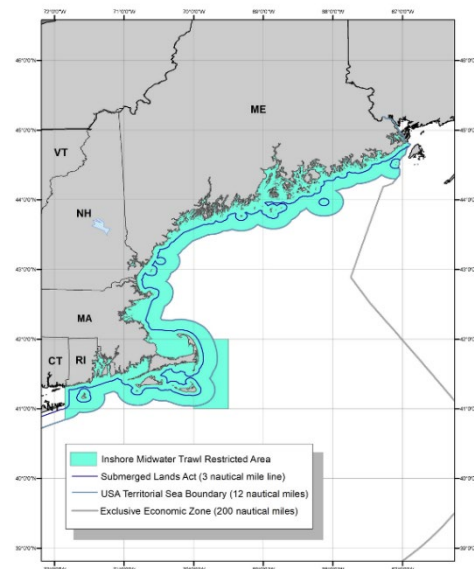
New England's 12-mile line has been affecting landings since implementation – impacted 2021 and will impact future years. The effective limit is substantially more than 12 miles in some places.

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<sup>1</sup> Recall Council discussion of this in February 2021

Inshore Midwater Trawl Restricted Area

This map includes the Inshore Midwater Trawl Restricted Area from Amendment 8 of the Herring Fishery Management Plan, 2/16/2021.



The Atlantic Herring fishery has become a choke-species for the Atlantic mackerel fishery.

In early 2020, the fishery collaborated to avoid RH/S and also luckily encountered mackerel further north early with observers onboard to benefit the cap estimates and give the fishery a chance (the previous year's ratio is used in a transition method until enough new trips are observed, so the fishery can potentially be shut down based on the previous year's data).

Cornell still has its real-time avoidance program through the squid-trawl network but has been slowed in last year due to Covid and switch away from BoatTracs.

### **Other Issues**

AP members requested more info on trends in the relatively recent jig fishery.

More information on the Canadian fishery/assessment/quota decisions would be helpful.

We are under a current rebuilding plan that is not likely to succeed, if we are heading to a new rebuilding plan, the Council should be aware of current events such as Canadian assessment and quota cut (8,000 MT to 4,000 MT).

The current status of mackerel remains overfished. Focusing on biomass alone (and not age structure) may be short-sighted in terms of overall rebuilding and resiliency.

Paul Rago asked: Is there a preference for particular rebuilding time series – e.g. constant catch, lower then higher catch, etc.

There was some preference voiced for a constant-catch scenario. There was some preference voiced for rebuilding that starts with low F rates, especially considering ecosystem/food web interactions.

Performance at Fzero may be necessary to evaluate value in cutting quotas. It doesn't seem likely that much would improve with no catch, so need to consider extending rebuilding timeframe.

The lack of ability to control recreational catch needs to be considered in any rebuilding action.

### **Research Priorities**

Related to RH/S – ASMFC partnered with USGS on RH/S genetic repository – see ASMFC webpage. Relates to trying to get to biological-based RH/S caps – they will need samples from the relevant fisheries (including mackerel) and the Council should encourage submission of relevant samples.

Council staff will re-distribute the MSB research priorities in case there are additional suggestions.