



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

1050 N. Highland Street • Suite 200A-N • Arlington, VA 22201
703.842.0740 • 703.842.0741 (fax) • www.asmfmc.org

MEMORANDUM

July 20, 2018

To: South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board
From: Cobia Technical Committee
Subject: Report on Board Task to Evaluate Recreational Landings

At the February 2018 meeting, the South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board (Board) tasked the Cobia Technical Committee (TC) with the following motion:

Move to recommend that the TC evaluate state specific management options in pounds and numbers of fish, and to provide directions to use alternative techniques such as in the black sea bass fishery. Evaluate the best method (i.e. pounds or numbers of fish) by which to determine the harvest impact of the management measures.

Motion by M. Duval and seconded by J. Estes.

To accomplish this task, the TC met three times via conference call and carried on discussions between calls via email.

The first call was to plan an initial course of action for accomplishing this task and ended with the conclusion that in order for the TC to evaluate methods to determine harvest impact, they first needed clarification on the sampling and estimation methods used by the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) to derive recreational landings estimates for cobia. A letter was sent from the Commission to Dr. Dave Van Voorhees, Chief of the NOAA Fisheries' Fisheries Statistics Division, requesting a call where staff who work on MRIP could address some questions from the TC.

The second call included, in addition to the TC, Dr. Van Voorhees, John Foster (NOAA Fisheries Recreational Fisheries Statistics Branch Chief), and Richard Cody (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and MRIP Operations Team). The TC received answers to several questions pertaining to topics such as site weighting, handling of outliers, the calculation of effort, and how estimates are made for "pulse" fisheries such as cobia.

Following this call, the TC met to discuss conclusions from the call with MRIP staff and whether any additional work was needed to accomplish the Board's task. The TC developed the following statement recommending use of MRIP data in Atlantic cobia management:

M18-069

The TC recommends managing based on the numbers of fish due to much lower variance with these estimates than those for weight. The TC, after consultation with MRIP staff, has concluded that the anomalously high years of landings in 2015 and 2016 are not the result of any violations to the MRIP survey design; therefore we find no justification for smoothing these numbers. However, high variability in the landings estimates for cobia specifically is probably the result of the implementation of the survey for such a rarely intercepted species. Thus, in the future the TC recommends consideration of alternative sources of data, such as those that would be collected through a biological monitoring program (e.g. length, age, sex, weight), to provide context when making management decisions based on MRIP landings estimates.