

**FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE
SPANISH MACKEREL
AUGUST 2026**

STATUS OF THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Fishery Management Plan History

FMP Documentation:	Original FMP Adoption	February 1983
	Amendment 2	July 1987
	Amendment 3	August 1989
	Amendment 4	October 1989
	Amendment 5	August 1990
	Amendment 6	December 1992
	Amendment 8	March 1998
	Amendment 9	April 2000
	Amendment 10	July 2000
	Amendment 11	December 1999
	Amendment 14	July 2002
	Amendment 15	August 2005
	Amendment 18	January 2012
	Amendment 19	July 2010
	Omnibus Amendment	August 2011
	Addendum I	August 2013
	Amendment 20A	August 2014
	Amendment 20B	March 2015
	Amendment 22	January 2014
	Amendment 23	January 2014
	Framework Action 2013	December 2014
	Framework Amendment 1	December 2014
	Framework Amendment 2	November 2014
	Framework Amendment 5	August 2017

Comprehensive Review: 2022

Spanish Mackerel is managed under the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Spanish Mackerel and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMP (SAFMC 1982; ASMFC 2011). The original Gulf and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils' Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources (e.g. mackerels) was approved in 1982 (SAFMC 1982) and went into effect in 1983. This plan managed Spanish Mackerel as one U.S. stock. Allocations were established for recreational and commercial fisheries, with the commercial allocation being divided between net and hook-and-line gears. The plan also established procedures for the Secretary of Commerce to act by regulatory amendment to resolve possible future conflicts in the fishery, such as establishing fishing zones and local quotas for each gear or user group. Numerous amendments have been implemented since the first FMP.

Amendment 2 revised Spanish Mackerel maximum sustainable yield (MSY) downward and recognized two migratory groups, the Gulf and Atlantic migratory groups, setting the Dade/Monroe County line (25° 20.4' N latitude) in south Florida as the migratory group boundary (SAFMC 1987). Management actions included the establishment of commercial quotas and recreational bag limits. Additionally, charter boat permits were required, and it was established that total allowable catch (TAC) for overfished stocks must be set below

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the upper range of acceptable biological catch (ABC). Finally, the use of purse seines on overfished mackerel stocks was prohibited.

Amendment 3 prohibited drift gill nets for coastal pelagics as well as purse seines and run-around gill nets for the overfished mackerels (SAFMC 1989a). The habitat section of the FMP was updated, and vessel safety consideration provisions affirmed no vessel will be forced to participate in the fishery under adverse conditions. A new objective to minimize waste and bycatch in the fishery was added to the plan.

Amendment 4 reallocated Spanish Mackerel equally between recreational and commercial fishermen on the Atlantic group with an increase in TAC (SAFMC 1989b).

Amendment 5 extended the management area for the Atlantic groups of mackerels through the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils' (MAFMC) jurisdiction (SAFMC 1990). It revised problems in the fishery and plan objectives to reflect updated stock conditions and management needs, revised the definition of "overfishing" to spawning stock biomass per recruit (SSBR) to prevent recruitment overfishing, provided that the SAFMC will be responsible for pre-season adjustments of TACs and bag limits for the Atlantic migratory groups of mackerels, redefined recreational bag limits as daily limits, created a provision specifying that the bag limit catch of mackerel may be sold, provided guidelines for corporate commercial vessel permits, and included a definition of "conflict", including those between user groups, gear types, or jurisdictions, to provide guidance to the Secretary.

Amendment 6 identified additional problems such as outdated stock information, inconsistent state–federal management, user-group and gear conflicts, and regulatory measures that were no longer adequate for sustainably managing Spanish Mackerel (SAFMC 1992). It also provided for rebuilding overfished stocks of mackerels within specific periods, provided for biennial assessments and adjustments, provided for more seasonal adjustment actions, including size limits, vessel trip limits, closed seasons or areas, and gear restrictions, provided for commercial Atlantic Spanish Mackerel possession limits, changed commercial permit requirements to allow qualification in one of three preceding years, discontinued the reversion of the bag limit to zero when the recreational quota is filled, modified the recreational fishing year to the calendar year, and changed all size limit measures to fork length (FL) only.

Amendment 8 identified additional problems of localized reductions in abundance and market disruptions, specified area-specific allowable gears (including hook-and-line, run-around nets, and cast nets), and revised commercial permit eligibility requirements by increasing the minimum level of documented commercial fishing activity needed to qualify for a permit (SAFMC 1996). It also revised the seasonal framework procedures to provide for consideration of public comment, redefine overfishing and allow for adjustment by framework procedure, allow changes in allocation ratio of Atlantic Spanish Mackerel, allow setting zero bag limits, and allow gear regulation including prohibition.

Amendment 9 allowed commercial possession of cut-off (damaged) Spanish Mackerel that comply with the minimum size limits and the trip limits in the Gulf, Mid-Atlantic, or South Atlantic exclusive economic zone (EEZ; sale of such cut-off fish is allowed if such fish are within the existing allowance for possession; SAFMC 2000).

Amendment 10 designated Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC) for coastal migratory pelagics in Florida Bay, Biscayne Bay, Card Sound, mangrove habitats of South Florida, the Florida Keys, and the Ten Thousand Islands (SAFMC 1998a).

Amendment 11 amended the FMP as required to make definitions of MSY, optimal yield (OY), overfishing and overfished consistent with National Standard Guidelines, identified and defined fishing communities, and addressed bycatch management measures (SAFMC 1998b).

Amendment 14 established a 3-year moratorium on the issuance of for-hire (charter vessel and headboat) permits for coastal migratory pelagic species in the Gulf of Mexico unless sooner replaced by a comprehensive effort limitation system (SAFMC 2002). This resulted in separate for-hire permits for the Gulf and South Atlantic. The control date for eligibility was established as March 29, 2001. The amendment also includes other provisions for eligibility, application, appeals, and transferability of permits.

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Amendment 15 changed the fishing year to March 1 through February 28/29 for Atlantic group King and Spanish Mackerels (SAFMC 2004).

Amendment 18 established annual catch limits (ACL), annual catch targets (ACT), and accountability measures (AM) for Spanish Mackerel (SAFMC 2011) as required under the 2006 Magnuson Stevens Reauthorization Act.

Amendment 19 updated the spatial representation of existing EFH and HAPC designations for South Atlantic species and established deepwater coral HPACs with associated prohibitions on the use of certain gear types within (SAFMC 2010).

Amendment 20A prohibited the sale of Spanish Mackerel caught under the recreational bag limit unless the fish were caught as part of a state-permitted tournament and the proceeds from the sale are donated to charity (SAFMC 2013a).

Amendment 20B established Northern and Southern Zones for Atlantic migratory group Spanish Mackerel. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries will close each zone when the respective quota is met or expected to be met (SAFMC 2015). The demarcation between the zones is at the North Carolina-South Carolina state line.

Amendment 22 modified headboat reporting regulations to require weekly electronic reporting of all SAFMC managed species (SAFMC 2013b).

Amendment 23 required dealers to possess a federal Gulf and South Atlantic universal dealer permit to purchase King and Spanish Mackerel and required weekly electronic dealer reporting. It also required federally permitted King and Spanish Mackerel fishermen to sell only to a federally permitted dealer (SAFMC 2014b).

Framework Amendment 1 updated the ACL and ACT for Gulf and Atlantic migratory groups of Spanish Mackerel (SAFMC 2014c) based on the results of the 2012 stock assessment which indicated that the stock was not overfished and that overfishing was not occurring (SEDAR 2012).

Framework Amendment 5 modified regulations governing dual-permitted vessels by allowing the retention of the recreational bag limit of King and Spanish Mackerel during commercial quota closures, clarifying that vessels possessing federal commercial permits may operate under recreational bag limits when commercial harvest is prohibited due to quota closure (SAFMC 2017).

The ASMFC approved the Omnibus Amendment in 2011 (ASMFC 2011). The management goal for the Omnibus Amendment is to bring the FMP for Spanish Mackerel under authority of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act, providing for more efficient and effective management and changes to management in the future.

Addendum I to the Omnibus Amendment established a pilot program that would allow states to reduce the Spanish Mackerel minimum size limit for the commercial pound net fishery to 11.5 in FL during the summer months of July through September for the 2013 and 2014 fishing years only (ASMFC 2013). In August 2015, the South Atlantic Board formally extended the provisions of Addendum I for the 2015, 2016, and 2017 fishing seasons. Reports by North Carolina, the only state to reduce their minimum size, were reviewed annually.

Framework Amendment 2 established commercial Atlantic Spanish Mackerel trip limits for the Southern Zone (SAFMC 2014d).

To ensure compliance with interstate requirements, North Carolina also manages this species under the North Carolina Fishery Management Plan for Interjurisdictional Fisheries (IJ FMP). The goal of the IJ FMP is to adopt FMPs, consistent with N.C. law, approved by the MAFMC, SAFMC, or the ASMFC by reference and implement corresponding fishery regulations in North Carolina to provide compliance or compatibility with approved fishery management plans and amendments, now and in the future. The goal of these plans, established under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (federal council plans) and the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ASMFC plans)

are analogous to the goals of the North Carolina Fisheries Reform Act of 1997 to “ensure long-term viability” of these fisheries (NCDMF 2022).

Management Unit

The management unit is defined for South Atlantic Spanish Mackerel within U.S. waters north of Miami-Dade/Monroe County line, Florida in the Atlantic Ocean.

Goal and Objectives

The goal of the SAFMC 1982 FMP for Coastal Migratory Pelagics was to institute management measures necessary to prevent exceeding maximum sustainable yield (MSY), establish a mandatory statistical reporting system for monitoring catch, and to minimize gear and user conflicts (SAFMC 1982). Amendment 12 to the Gulf and South Atlantic fishery management councils’ FMP for Coastal Migratory Pelagics lists eight plan objectives:

- The primary objective of the FMP is to stabilize yield at MSY, allow recovery of overfished populations, and maintain sufficient population levels to ensure adequate recruitment.
- To provide a flexible management system for the resource which minimizes regulatory delay while retaining substantial Council and public input in management decisions and which can rapidly adapt to changes in resource abundance, new scientific information, and changes in fishing patterns among user groups or by areas.
- To provide necessary information for effective management and establish a mandatory reporting system.
- To minimize gear and user group conflicts.
- To distribute the TAC of Atlantic migratory group Spanish Mackerel between recreational and commercial user groups based on the catches that occurred during the early to mid-1970s, which is prior to the development of the deep-water, run-around gill net fishery and when the resource was not overfished.
- To minimize waste and bycatch in the fishery.
- To provide appropriate management to address specific migratory groups of King Mackerel.
- To optimize the social and economic benefits of the coastal migratory pelagic fisheries.

The primary goal of the ASMFC Omnibus Amendment is to bring the FMPs for Spanish Mackerel, Spot, and Spotted Seatrout under the authority of the Act, providing for more efficient and effective management and changes to management for the future (ASMFC 2011). Omnibus Amendment 1 objectives include:

- Manage the Spanish Mackerel fishery by restricting fishing mortality to rates below the threshold fishing mortality rates to provide adequate spawning potential to sustain long-term abundance of the Spanish Mackerel populations.
- Manage the Spanish Mackerel stock to maintain the spawning stock biomass above the target biomass levels.
- Minimize endangered species bycatch in the Spanish Mackerel fishery.
- Provide a flexible management system that coordinates management activities between state and federal waters to promote complementary regulations throughout Spanish Mackerel’s range which minimizes regulatory delay while retaining substantial ASMFC, Council, and public input into management decisions, and adapts to changes in resource abundance, new scientific information, and changes in fishing patterns among user groups or by area.
- Develop research priorities that will further refine the Spanish Mackerel management program to maximize the biological, social, and economic benefits derived from the Spanish Mackerel population.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STOCK

Biological Profile

Spanish Mackerel are characterized by a coastal pelagic life-history, typified by habitat utilization of open waters near the coast. They make thermally induced northern and southern migrations and prefer habitat above 68°F. In North Carolina waters, Spanish Mackerel occur primarily from April to November. They migrate south to Florida in the late fall. Conversely, in the summer months, they commonly utilize estuarine and coastal river habitat. Spanish Mackerel spawn from May to September, are fast growing, and may live to be 12 years old. Spanish Mackerel in North Carolina rarely exceed 33 in FL, and typical recreational catches are between 12 and 15 in FL. Both sexes sexually mature by age 2. Spanish Mackerel are active predators and feed primarily on small, schooling pelagic fish such as anchovies and herring (Manooch 1984).

Stock Status

In 2022, the Atlantic Spanish Mackerel stock was assessed and peer reviewed through the Southeast Data, Assessment and Review. The results of the assessment indicate Atlantic Spanish Mackerel are not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring (SEDAR 2022).

Stock Assessment

The SEDAR 78 South Atlantic Spanish Mackerel assessment took place over a series of webinars held from May 2021 to March 2022 (SEDAR 2022). This SEDAR was an operational assessment using data from 1986–2020. The assessment estimated that spawning stock has fluctuated near or above the minimum stock size threshold (MSST) level. The base-run estimate of terminal (2020) spawning stock was above the MSST ($SSB_{2020}/MSST = 1.40$). The estimated fishing rate has been at or below the maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT), represented by F_{MSY} with the exception of the terminal year (2020). The terminal estimate, which is based on a 3-year geometric mean, was below F_{MSY} in the base run ($F_{2018-2020}/F_{MSY} = 0.77$) and in the median of the Monte Carlo/Bootstrap Ensemble ($F_{2018-2020}/F_{MSY} = 0.74$), indicating that the stock is not experiencing overfishing. However, if the overfishing rate of 2020 continued in 2021, the geometric mean would indicate overfishing.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FISHERY

Current Regulations

The North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) currently complements the management measures of the Coastal Migratory Pelagic FMP through rules MFC Rule 15A NCAC 03M .0512 and proclamation authority (NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03M .0512). Current regulations include a recreational bag limit of 15 Spanish Mackerel per person per day and 12-in FL minimum size. Commercial regulations also include a 12-in FL minimum size and trip limit of 3,500 lb. Federal vessel permits are required for commercial, charter, and headboats fishing in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Sale of Spanish Mackerel caught under the bag limit are prohibited unless the fish are caught as part of a state-permitted tournament and the proceeds from the sale are donated to charity.

Commercial Fishery

In 2025, commercial landings were 772,296 lb (Table 1; Figure 1) and 98% of the Spanish Mackerel harvest were taken in estuarine and ocean gill nets (Figure 2). The predominant commercial fisheries for Spanish Mackerel include ocean and estuarine gill nets (Table 2). Landings in 2025 were lower than the previous 10-year (2015–2024) average of 825,989 lb, driven by estuarine gill net and pound net landings that were 42.1% and 68.6% below their respective 10-year averages. The North Carolina commercial fishery is responsible for landing approximately 20% of the South Atlantic annual landings. Atlantic Spanish Mackerel catches are allocated into a Northern zone (NC through the Mid-Atlantic) and a Southern zone

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(SC, GA, and FL east coast to Dade-Monroe County line). On September 20, 2025, the harvest of Spanish Mackerel in federal waters was closed when the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) estimated the Northern Zone quota had been reached, but commercial harvest reopened on September 29, 2025, following a quota transfer of 75,000 lb from the Southern Zone. On October 7, 2025, the harvest of Spanish Mackerel in federal waters again closed, and a harvest period for the commercial Spanish Mackerel fishery in North Carolina Coastal Fishing Waters was opened with a 500-lb daily trip limit. The state water harvest period closed on November 14, 2025 (Proclamation [FF-36-2025](#)).

Table 1. Recreational harvest and releases and commercial harvest of Spanish Mackerel from North Carolina, 1994–2025.

Year	Recreational			Commercial	
	Number Landed	Number Released	Weight Landed (lb)	Weight Landed (lb)	Total Weight Landed (lb)
1994	641,980	292,919	724,589	531,371	1,255,960
1995	397,190	239,972	492,096	402,392	894,488
1996	533,333	184,518	709,589	401,830	1,111,419
1997	956,589	304,629	1,444,907	766,958	2,211,865
1998	374,804	145,746	488,951	372,415	861,366
1999	891,001	253,317	1,035,943	459,100	1,495,043
2000	1,102,777	451,910	1,175,351	659,426	1,834,777
2001	942,500	338,918	1,155,788	653,673	1,809,461
2002	787,125	309,546	987,238	698,448	1,685,686
2003	540,399	266,887	641,024	456,784	1,097,808
2004	534,720	317,189	819,978	456,242	1,276,220
2005	561,073	303,641	526,054	446,001	972,055
2006	439,736	165,098	624,488	470,662	1,095,150
2007	604,518	340,027	799,263	487,879	1,287,142
2008	1,013,980	806,280	1,234,030	415,405	1,649,435
2009	1,480,931	752,806	2,155,692	961,811	3,117,503
2010	927,116	701,634	1,116,099	911,866	2,027,965
2011	854,554	479,586	1,100,110	871,217	1,971,327
2012	995,852	591,792	1,327,350	916,439	2,243,789
2013	994,599	685,692	1,242,029	620,752	1,862,781
2014	1,028,925	814,064	1,193,442	673,974	1,867,416
2015	835,011	514,714	981,867	561,714	1,543,581
2016	918,352	546,950	907,400	601,623	1,509,023
2017	995,706	688,062	1,094,778	816,089	1,910,867
2018	1,012,889	1,019,418	1,156,702	796,890	1,953,592
2019	1,478,890	1,340,366	1,694,247	722,398	2,416,645
2020	1,286,131	1,267,210	1,843,314	1,033,526	2,876,840
2021	1,312,929	1,294,525	1,894,535	1,155,289	3,049,824
2022	1,898,755	2,268,283	1,841,527	926,035	2,767,562
2023	1,204,175	1,293,628	1,216,236	804,848	2,021,084
2024	1,954,067	1,528,319	2,710,335	841,502	3,551,837
2025	1,420,254	1,580,709	2,009,677	772,296	2,781,973
Mean	951,632	661,537	1,172,095	674,017	1,846,112

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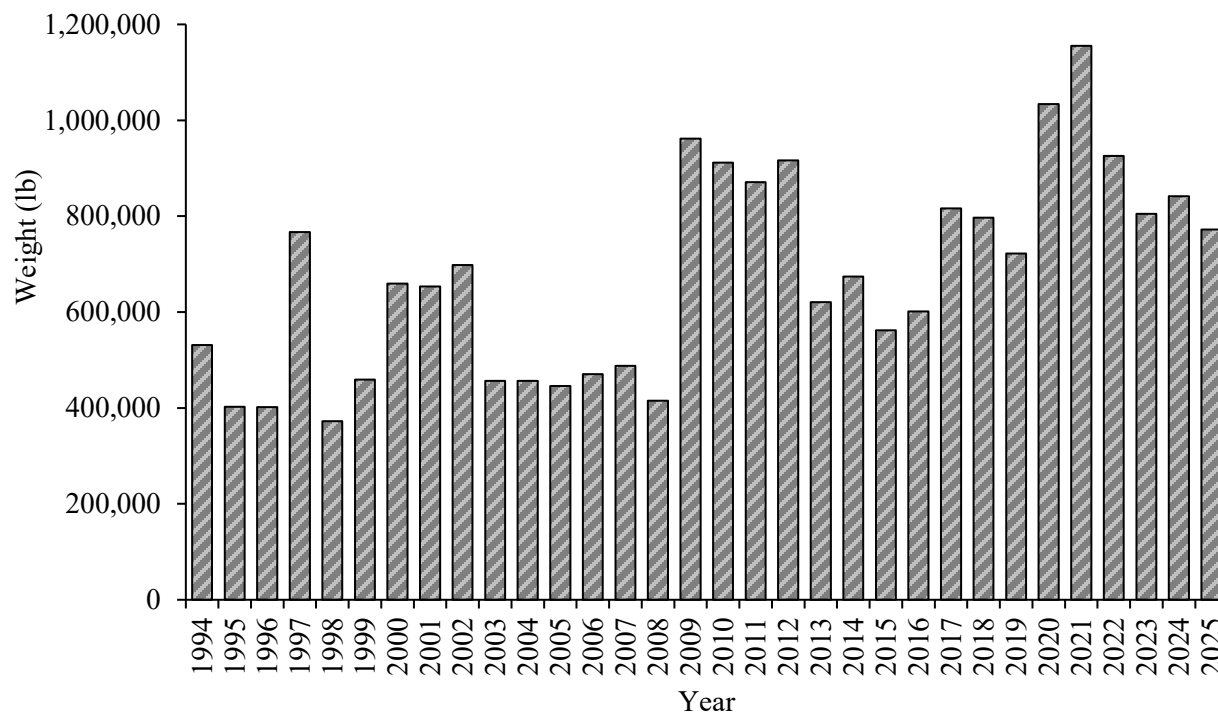


Figure 1. Annual commercial landings for Spanish Mackerel in North Carolina, 1994–2025.

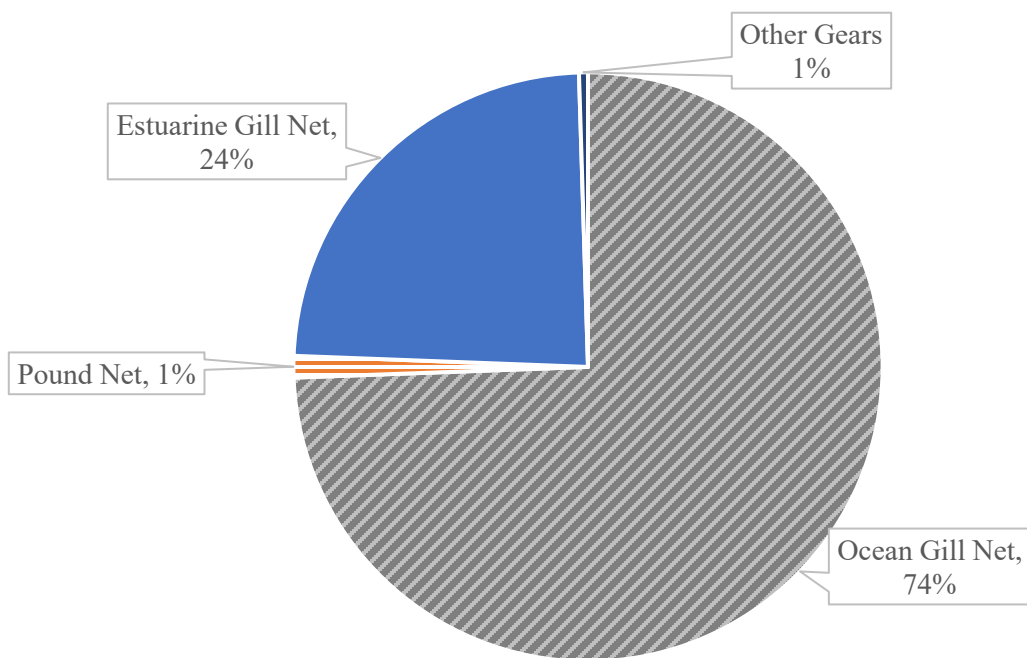


Figure 2. Spanish Mackerel commercial harvest in 2025 by gear type.

Table 2. North Carolina commercial harvest of Spanish Mackerel with landings (lb) by gear type, 1994–2025.

Year	Gear				Total
	Ocean Gill Net	Estuarine Gill Net	Pound Net	Other	
1994	327,703	137,904	29,708	36,057	531,371
1995	233,384	104,739	49,077	15,192	402,392
1996	215,542	124,008	45,221	17,059	401,830
1997	502,882	173,722	60,898	29,457	766,958
1998	234,621	97,398	26,962	13,435	372,415
1999	297,435	98,855	49,485	13,326	459,100
2000	462,459	162,291	21,792	12,884	659,426
2001	411,974	186,628	33,163	21,909	653,673
2002	463,430	205,865	24,118	5,035	698,448
2003	368,171	80,219	5,218	3,176	456,784
2004	359,467	90,317	3,524	2,934	456,242
2005	257,074	180,874	2,184	5,869	446,001
2006	358,614	100,114	2,783	9,152	470,662
2007	420,680	57,144	3,440	6,615	487,879
2008	268,435	93,579	49,534	3,857	415,405
2009	454,081	266,621	228,201	12,908	961,811
2010	177,091	631,218	96,490	7,068	911,866
2011	287,908	524,967	53,704	4,638	871,217
2012	501,369	372,759	38,644	3,667	916,439
2013	346,810	250,524	18,764	4,654	620,752
2014	422,528	221,799	25,772	3,875	673,974
2015	289,216	229,114	40,032	3,353	561,714
2016	328,622	242,291	27,806	2,904	601,623
2017	507,847	287,434	17,314	3,494	816,089
2018	486,691	280,689	19,931	9,579	796,890
2019	354,891	322,101	39,118	6,288	722,398
2020	600,966	369,436	53,384	9,740	1,033,526
2021	709,163	404,112	31,767	10,247	1,155,289
2022	457,337	432,709	29,953	6,037	926,035
2023	446,273	341,978	13,827	2,770	804,848
2024	540,741	281,108	17,436	2,216	841,478
2025	574,751	184,654	9,111	3,780	772,296

Recreational Fishery

Recreational landings of Spanish Mackerel are estimated from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). For more information on MRIP see <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/recreational-fishing-data>. Spanish Mackerel are a favorite of many anglers due to their exciting behavior when hooked and their desirable flavor and texture when cooked. Recreational anglers target Spanish Mackerel by trolling spoons and plugs inshore. Anglers catch most Spanish Mackerel between May and September once water temperature has warmed to 70°F. Recreational anglers harvested 2,009,677 lb of Spanish Mackerel in 2025, which was lower than 2024 landings but 31% higher than the previous 10-year average (Table 1; Figure 3).

The DMF offers award citations for exceptional catches of Spanish Mackerel. Spanish Mackerel greater than 6 lb are eligible for an award citation. In 2025, 42 citations were awarded (Figure 4).

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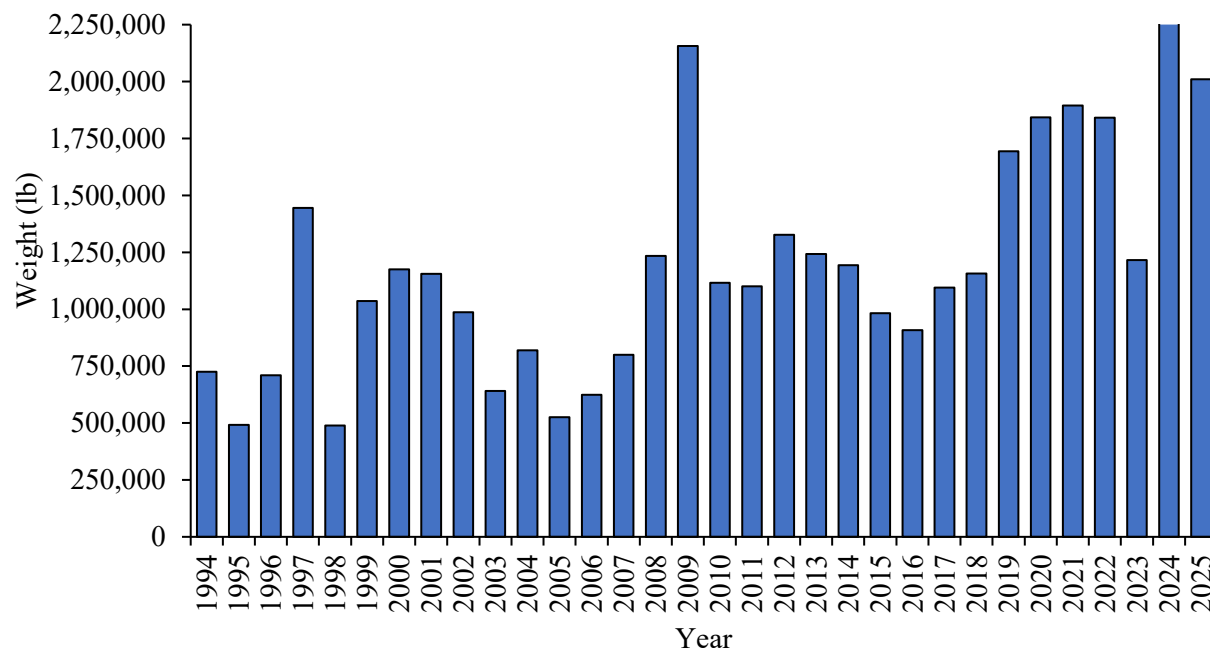


Figure 3. Annual recreational landings for Spanish Mackerel in North Carolina, 1994–2025.

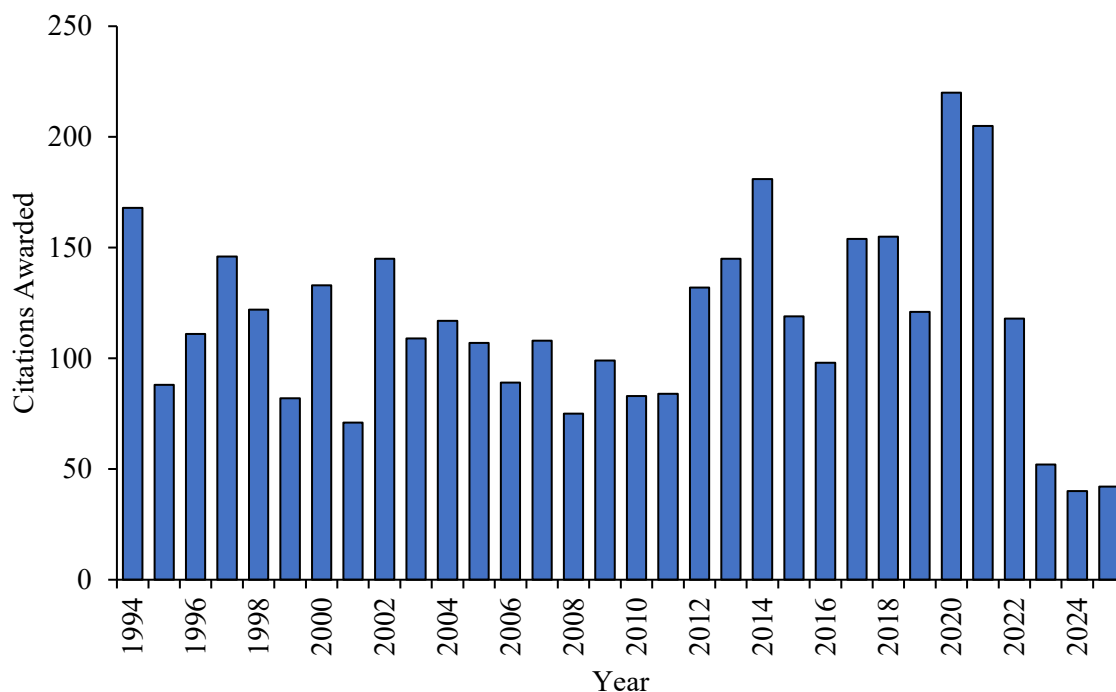


Figure 4. North Carolina Saltwater Fishing Tournament citations awarded for Spanish Mackerel from 1994–2025. Citations are awarded for Spanish Mackerel >6 lb.

MONITORING PROGRAM DATA**Fishery-Dependent Monitoring**

Length-frequency information for the commercial Spanish Mackerel fishery in North Carolina is collected through DMF's fish house sampling programs. The majority of fish sampled were collected from Program 431 (sciaenid pound net), 434 (ocean gill net), and Program 461 (estuarine gill nets and seines). Through fish house sampling programs, 987 Spanish Mackerel were measured in 2025 with a mean FL of 17.6 in (Table 3; Figures 5 and 6). Aging structures, otoliths, are collected from fishery-dependent sampling programs and are sent to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) in Panama City, Florida for processing and ageing (Table 4). Length and weight information for the recreational fishery are collected through the MRIP dockside sampling which measured 623 Spanish Mackerel with a mean FL of 15.6 in (Table 5; Figure 7). Approximately 78% of the total Spanish Mackerel harvest in 2025 was concentrated in the 12–17-in length class (Figure 6).

Table 3. Spanish Mackerel length (FL, in) data from commercial fish house samples, 1997–2025.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
1994	11.7	6.3	23.6	675
1995	14.1	9.4	33.7	1,223
1996	14.5	8.8	26.8	686
1997	14.2	7.8	23.7	1,072
1998	14.8	8.2	26.0	983
1999	13.7	6.8	24.4	1,526
2000	15.4	8.3	25.4	863
2001	15.1	9.6	26.0	755
2002	15.0	11.0	23.6	987
2003	15.1	9.8	23.9	342
2004	16.8	11.9	25.9	478
2005	15.9	9.3	27.4	1,117
2006	16.4	7.0	27.6	1,583
2007	15.3	8.0	31.9	1,797
2008	15.3	7.3	26.3	1,952
2009	14.8	7.5	29.1	3,064
2010	14.1	9.5	26.0	1,252
2011	14.8	10.6	27.2	3,258
2012	15.6	8.2	27.4	2,918
2013	16.4	10.6	26.4	2,515
2014	16.0	8.6	26.1	2,979
2015	15.7	10.6	26.4	2,464
2016	15.8	11.0	28.8	3,606
2017	15.9	10.7	28.0	2,707
2018	15.7	10.8	26.4	1,826
2019	16.4	10.7	29.7	2,988
2020	15.8	8.6	29.1	3,364
2021	16.1	10.3	28.6	2,309
2022	16.5	10.4	29.1	1,205
2023	16.6	11.3	25.8	1,019
2024	16.6	11.4	26.5	1,207
2025	17.6	11.4	27.6	987

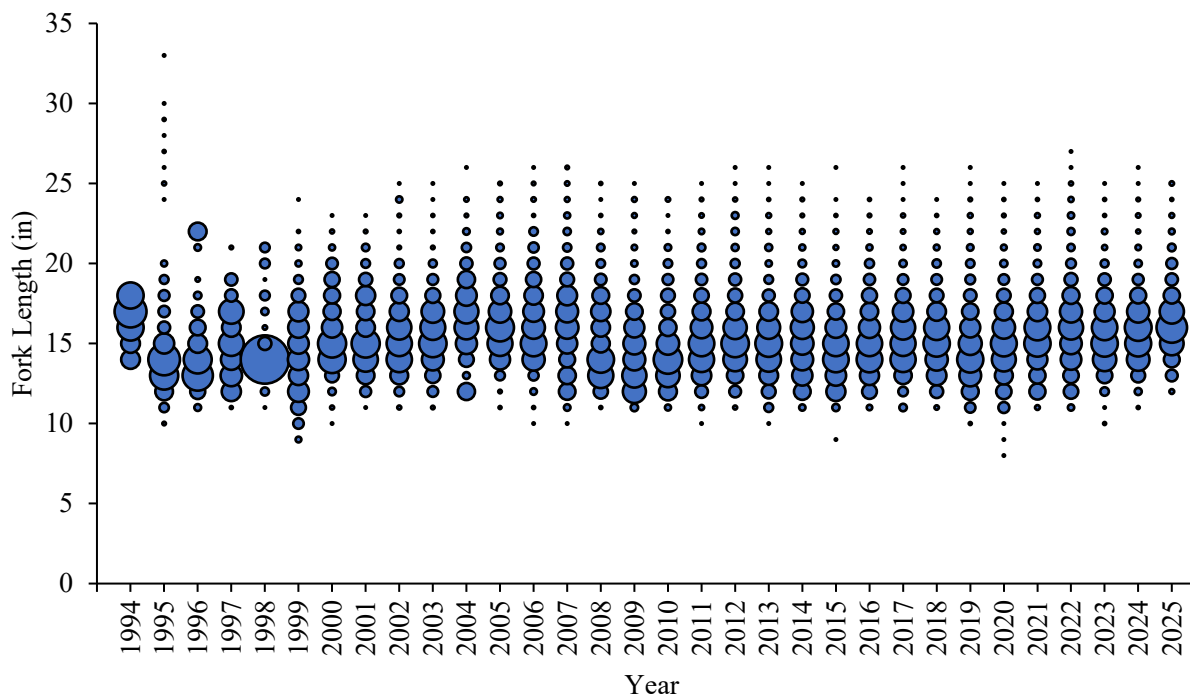


Figure 5. Commercial length frequency for Spanish Mackerel harvested, 1994–2025. Bubbles represent 1-in length bins, and the bubble size is proportional to the number of fish at that length.

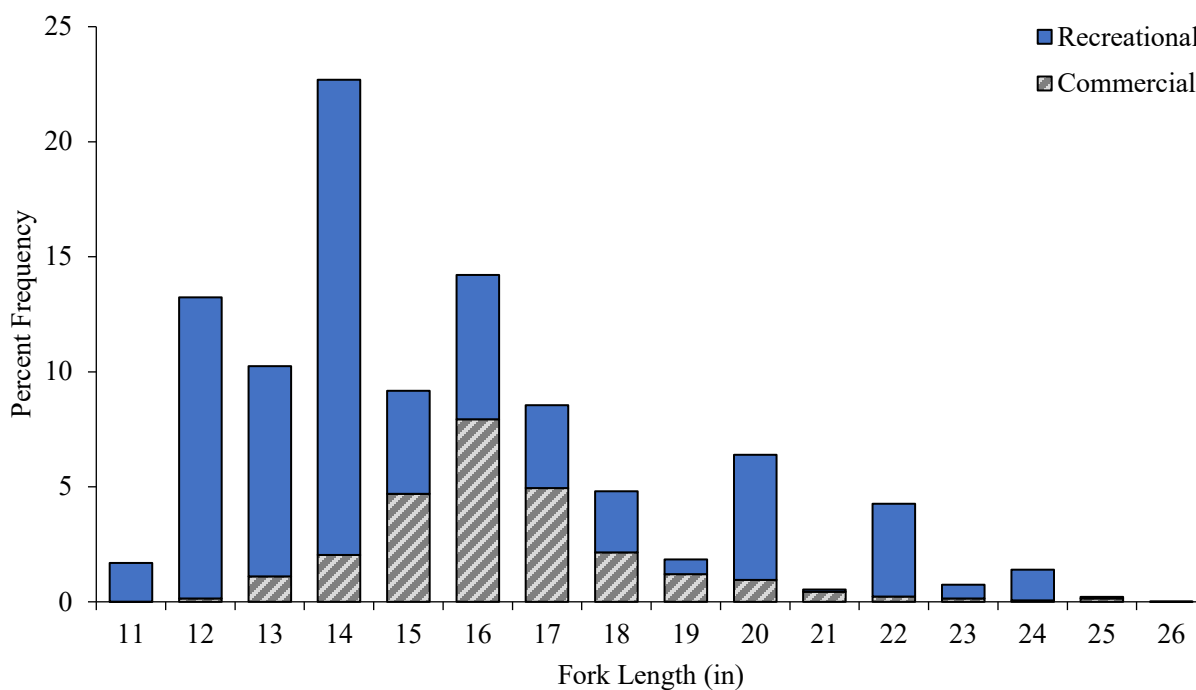


Figure 6. Commercial and recreational length frequency distribution from Spanish Mackerel harvested in 2025.

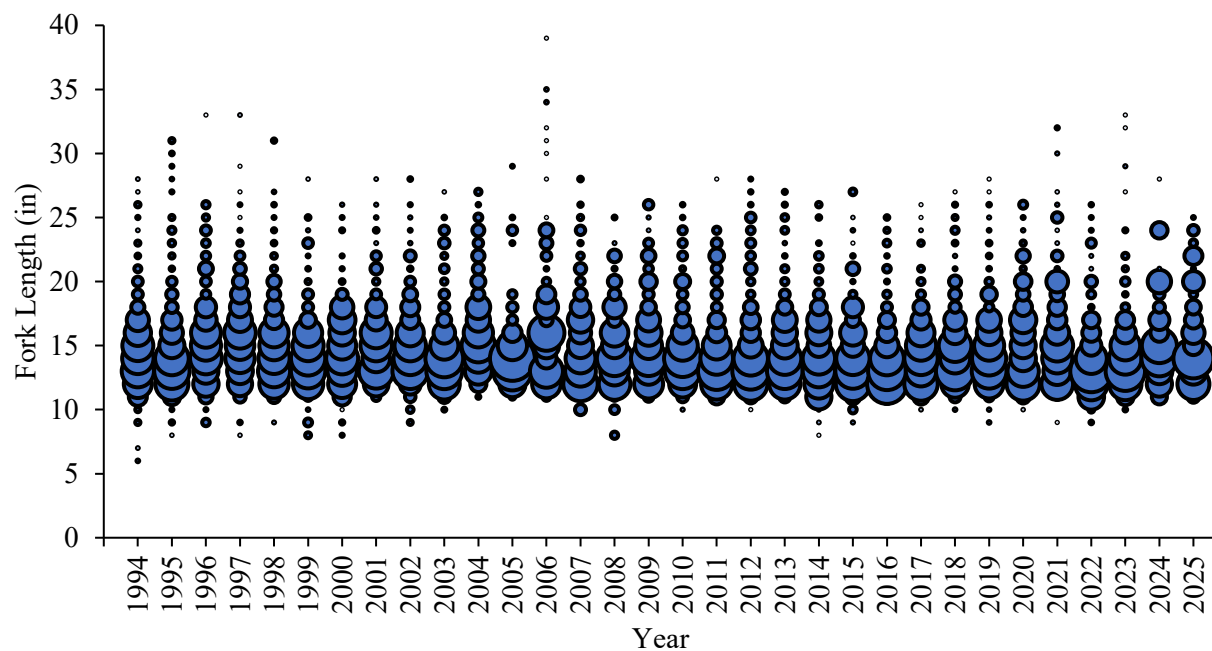


Figure 7. Recreational length frequency for Spanish Mackerel harvested, 1994–2025. Bubbles represent 1 in length bins, and the bubble size is proportional to the number of fish at that length.

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Table 4. Mean, minimum, and maximum length (FL, in) and total number sampled of Spanish Mackerel collected by DMF from both fishery-dependent (commercial and recreational) and independent (survey) sources for ageing by the NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center, 1997–2025.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
1997	14.0	5.6	24.3	403
1998	15.5	7.9	28.3	430
1999	14.7	7.4	30.5	294
2000	17.4	8.9	27.2	466
2001	16.2	8.0	26.2	473
2002	16.2	5.7	28.0	337
2003	14.5	9.8	26.0	330
2004	14.9	10.0	26.4	282
2005	14.7	8.7	25.4	304
2006	14.9	10.0	26.9	291
2007	14.9	10.4	31.7	297
2008	14.3	7.7	26.9	328
2009	15.3	9.3	25.1	317
2010	14.9	6.9	25.4	411
2011	15.1	6.1	28.0	430
2012	14.5	6.3	26.4	556
2013	15.2	7.4	27.5	370
2014	14.7	7.6	25.8	515
2015	14.8	7.2	27.6	412
2016	14.9	8.5	29.1	568
2017	14.9	7.0	28.1	450
2018	16.0	7.8	29.0	463
2019	14.3	5.0	28.0	640
2020	16.4	4.8	27.3	337
2021	15.0	5.8	25.7	778
2022	15.8	8.7	27.0	698
2023	14.6	6.3	26.6	671
2024	15.5	9.1	26.5	588
2025	16.2	7.6	26.5	621

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Table 5. Spanish Mackerel length (FL, in) data from Marine Recreational Information Program samples, 1984–2025.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
1984	14.7	13.0	23.8	28
1985	18.5	9.8	27.4	45
1986	15.2	8.1	27.2	110
1987	14.9	9.1	34.1	950
1988	16.7	7.9	32.9	1,118
1989	14.7	7.9	33.5	1,799
1990	15.5	8.3	35.5	2,160
1991	14.9	6.3	37.0	2,135
1992	15.2	7.5	33.1	1,354
1993	15.9	9.0	28.5	1,056
1994	15.0	6.4	29.4	2,255
1995	14.9	8.2	31.9	799
1996	15.9	9.8	33.7	841
1997	16.0	8.9	33.3	1,846
1998	15.3	9.2	31.1	895
1999	14.8	8.5	28.9	1,286
2000	15.2	9.0	27.2	1,242
2001	15.5	11.4	28.7	858
2002	15.3	9.5	28.0	827
2003	14.8	10.8	28.0	476
2004	16.7	11.1	27.5	298
2005	14.6	11.9	29.2	289
2006	16.0	11.1	35.4	235
2007	15.4	10.6	28.6	240
2008	15.2	8.9	26.2	596
2009	15.8	11.4	26.9	788
2010	15.2	10.7	26.5	763
2011	15.0	11.1	28.1	543
2012	15.1	10.6	28.0	776
2013	15.1	10.1	27.1	454
2014	14.9	9.0	29.9	754
2015	14.8	9.2	27.4	644
2016	14.3	11.0	26.3	1,030
2017	14.8	10.3	26.4	1,023
2018	15.0	9.9	27.2	1,691
2019	15.0	9.3	28.1	1,486
2020	15.6	9.0	27.5	1,914
2021	15.8	9.6	32.3	1,313
2022	14.1	9.7	26.6	1,079
2023	14.4	9.9	29.9	1,061
2024	15.8	10.6	30.4	343
2025	15.6	11.2	25.5	623

Fishery-Independent Monitoring

In 2025, independent sampling programs sampled 220 Spanish Mackerel with a mean FL of 16.9 in (Table 6). Most length-frequency information for Spanish Mackerel is collected in the division's statewide Independent Gill Net Survey (Program 915) and the Pamlico Sound Trawl Survey (Program 195). Otoliths are collected from both fishery-independent sampling programs and sent to SEFSC (Table 4).

Table 6. Mean, minimum and maximum length (FL, in) and total number sampled of Spanish Mackerel from fishery-independent sampling programs, 1994–2025.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
1994	5.6	2.2	10.2	23
1995	7.0	4.5	9.1	44
1996	10.8	2.8	14.6	11
1997	7.8	2.8	13.9	57
1998	7.7	2.2	19.9	90
1999	8.4	3.1	19.3	32
2000	15.8	2.8	23.9	151
2001	15.6	4.1	24.4	154
2002	16.5	8.1	23.4	45
2003	16.6	9.7	22.4	35
2004	14.0	4.8	22.5	16
2005	14.0	1.9	24.1	63
2006	14.1	6.9	21.3	47
2007	11.5	2.2	21.8	162
2008	12.9	3.1	26.8	372
2009	14.0	4.3	22.4	547
2010	13.5	3.0	21.7	376
2011	14.0	2.0	20.5	130
2012	12.8	1.5	22.8	133
2013	11.4	4.6	23.9	107
2014	10.5	1.7	19.0	43
2015	12.1	2.0	21.7	52
2016	14.7	2.0	22.4	48
2017	16.8	2.8	24.6	129
2018	12.9	2.2	21.5	89
2019	12.2	1.1	22.6	559
2020	6.1	2.0	13.4	344
2021	13.9	2.0	22.8	369
2022	15.4	4.4	25.3	614
2023	14.7	2.0	22.2	405
2024	15.4	2.1	25.2	406
2025	16.9	2.0	23.1	220

RESEARCH NEEDS

From Omnibus Amendment (ASMFC 2011):

- Increase collection of fishery-dependent length, sex, age, and Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) data to improve stock assessment accuracy. Simulations on CPUE trends should be explored and impacts on

assessment results determined. Data collection is needed for all states, particularly those north of North Carolina.

- Develop fishery-independent methods to monitor stock size.
- Provide better estimates of recruitment, natural mortality rates, fishing mortality rates, and standing stock. Specific information should include an estimate of the total amount caught and distribution of catch by area, season, and type of gear.
- Investigate the discard mortality of Spanish Mackerel in the commercial and recreational trolling fisheries and commercial gill net fishery and shrimp trawl fishery.
- Evaluate potential bias of the lack of appropriate stratification of the data used to generate age-length keys.

MANAGEMENT

In North Carolina, Spanish Mackerel are included in the North Carolina IJ FMP (NCDMF 2022), which defers, to the SAFMC's Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMP (SAFMC 2015) and the ASMFC's Spanish Mackerel FMP (ASMFC 2013).

Spanish Mackerel is currently managed under recent Amendment 20A (SAFMC 2013a), Amendment 20B (SAFMC 2015) and Framework Amendment 1 (SAFMC 2014b) to the Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMP. Amendment 20A prohibits the sale of all recreational bag-limit-caught Spanish Mackerel, except those harvested during a state-permitted tournament. Amendment 20B establishes separate commercial quotas of Atlantic Spanish Mackerel for a Northern Zone (north of NC-SC state line) and Southern Zone (south of NC-SC state line). Framework Amendment 1 modifies the annual catch limits for Spanish Mackerel in the U.S. Atlantic and modifies the recreational annual catch target, based on the results of the most recent stock assessments for these stocks. North Carolina currently has a 12-in FL minimum size limit, a 15 fish per day bag limit for recreational anglers and a 3,500-lb commercial trip limit. Harvest is open year-round and based on a fishing year of March 1 to the last day in February with commercial and recreational fisheries closing when the quota is reached.

In 2011, the ASMFC's South Atlantic State-Federal Fisheries Management Board approved the Omnibus Amendment for Spot, Spotted Seatrout, and Spanish Mackerel (ASMFC 2011). For Spanish Mackerel, the Amendment includes commercial and recreational management measures, adaptive management measures, and a process for Board review and action in response to changes in the federal regulations. This allows for complementary management throughout the range of the species.

The Board approved Addendum I (ASMFC 2013) to establish a pilot program to allow states to reduce the Spanish Mackerel minimum size limit for the commercial pound net fishery to 11.5 in from July through September for the 2013 and 2014 fishing years. In August 2015, the Board evaluated the success of the pilot program and extended the provisions of Addendum I for the 2015–2018 fishing years. The program was created to reduce waste of these shorter fish, which are discarded dead in the summer months, by converting them to landed fish that will be counted against the quota. The addendum responded to reports about the increased incidence of Spanish Mackerel $\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{1}{2}$ -in short of the 12-in FL minimum size limit in pound nets during the summer months which die prior to being released, possibly due to a combination of temperature, stress, and crowding. While work has been done to experiment with using wall or panel mesh sizes and escape panels, little success has been made in releasing undersized fish quickly enough to prevent dead discards during this time of year. North Carolina did not implement the Addendum in 2019. Current management strategies for Spanish Mackerel in South Atlantic waters are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Summary of N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission management strategies for Spanish Mackerel.

Management Strategy	Implementation Status
Prohibits Purse Gill Nets when taking King or Spanish Mackerel	Rule 15A NCAC 03M .0512
12-in FL minimum size limit. Fifteen fish recreational creel limit. Commercial Vessel Permit requirements. Commercial trip limit of 3,500 lb of King, Spanish, or aggregate. Charter vessels or head boats with Commercial Vessel Permit must comply with possession limits when fishing with more than three persons.	Proclamation FF-12-2025
Established a harvest period for the commercial Spanish Mackerel fishery in North Carolina Coastal Fishing Waters and implemented a 500-lb daily trip limit. The fishery closed Nov 14, 2025.	Proclamation FF-36-2025

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