



2017 Recreational Cobia Season

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Marine Fisheries

Steve Poland and Michelle Duval

February 16, 2017



Overview

- History of cobia management
 - Federal
 - State
- 2016 management and recreational cobia harvest
- Analysis of management options for 2017
 - 2017 federal closure
 - Options for consideration

History of Cobia Management

Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan; joint plan between South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils (king and Spanish mackerel, cobia)

- 1983: 33-inch fork length minimum size limit
- 1990: two-fish recreational bag limit and commercial possession limit
- 1997: management unit expanded through Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's jurisdiction (New York)

History of Cobia Management

- Before 2012, cobia managed as a single stock throughout Gulf and Atlantic coasts (no annual catch limits or allocations)
- Amendment 18 implemented 2006 Magnuson Stevens Act requirements (effective January 2012)
- Amendment 20B modified stock boundary and set new annual catch limits based on 2013 assessment (effective March 2015)
 - Atlantic stock 2016 allowable biological catch and total annual catch limit: 670,000 pounds (recreational = 620,000 pounds; commercial = 50,000 pounds)

Federal Magnuson Stevens Act Requirements



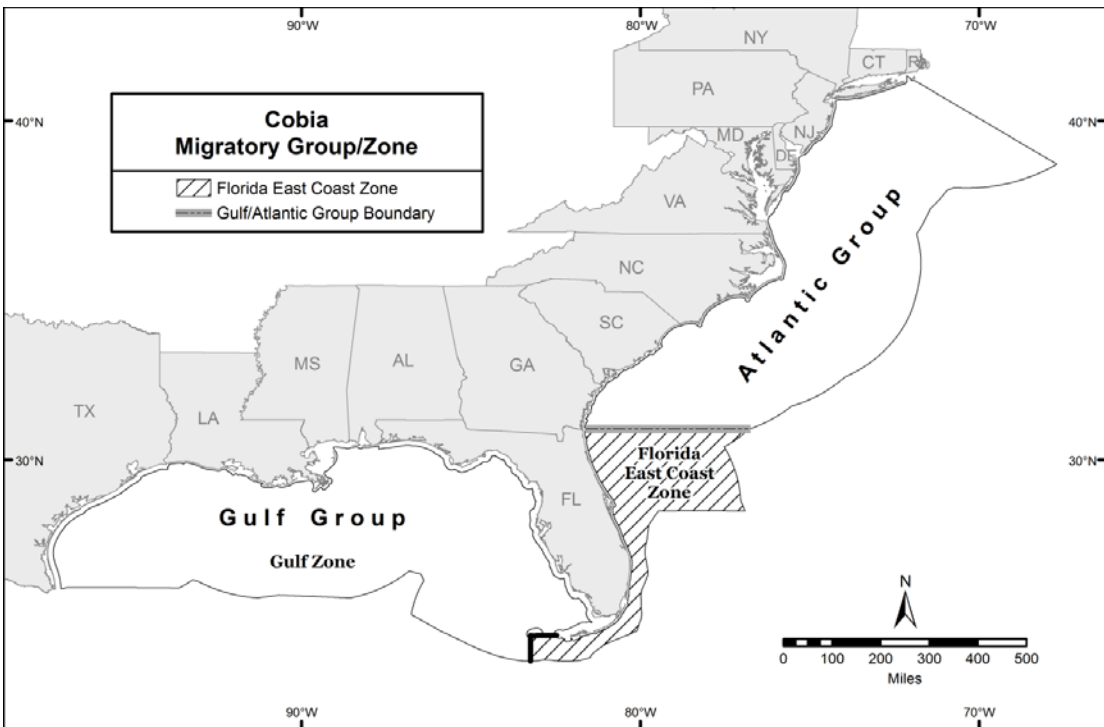
Accountability measures

- Constrain harvest to annual catch limit
- Make adjustments if annual catch limit is exceeded
- In-season closures, payback provisions (pounds, numbers of fish), season length adjustments

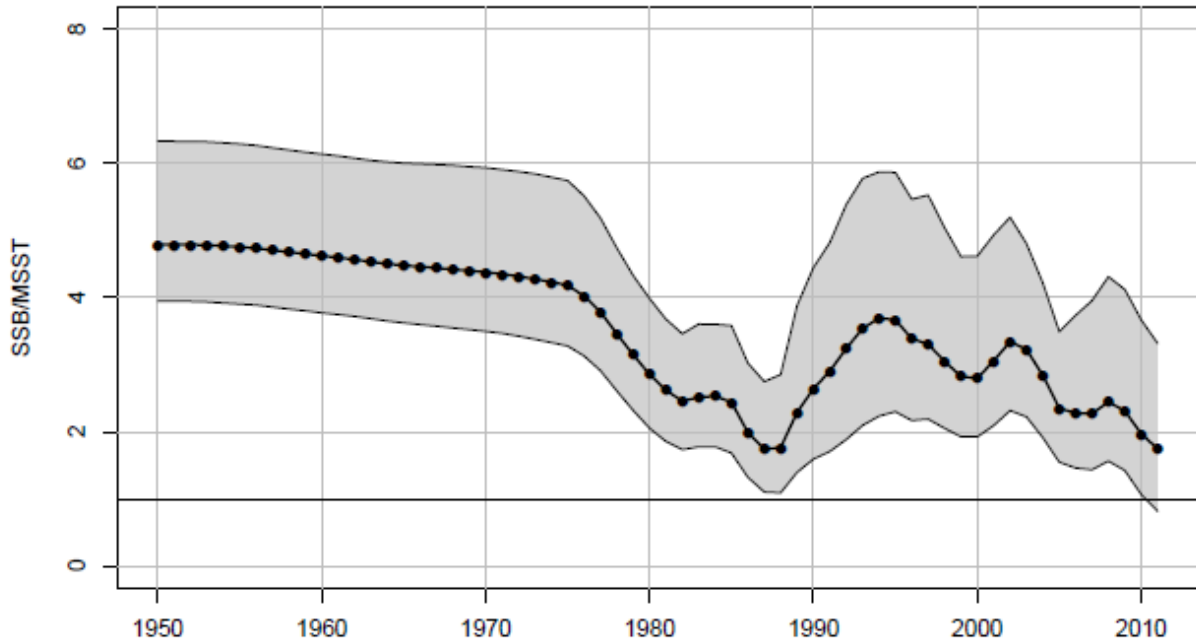
History of Cobia Management

2013 stock assessment set biological boundary between Gulf and Atlantic stocks at Florida/Georgia border

- Gulf stock: Texas – east Florida
- Atlantic stock: Georgia – New York
- Separate assessments for each stock
- Included data through 2011 for each
- Neither stock overfished nor overfishing occurring

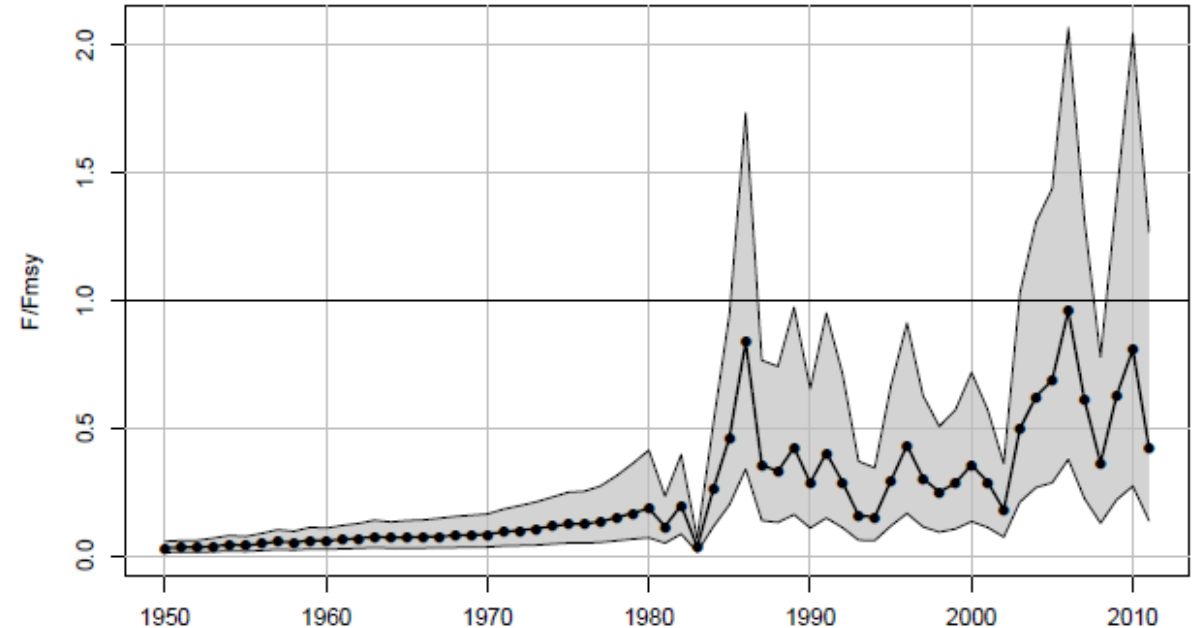


History of Cobia Management



NOT OVERFISHED: Ratio of spawning fish biomass to minimum stock threshold > 1

NOT OVERFISHING: Ratio of fishing mortality rate (F) to fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield (F_{msy}) < 1



2016 Cobia Management

- 2015: Recreational cobia harvest exceeds Annual Catch Limit by 255 percent (1,554,394 pounds)
- February 2016: Commission implements one-fish-per-person recreational bag limit; requests additional analyses regarding size limit increases from NOAA Fisheries
- March 2016: NOAA Fisheries announces June 20 federal waters closure to recreational harvest

2016 Cobia Management

May 2016: Commission implemented the following recreational management measures:

- May 23 through Sept. 30 season
- 37-inch fork length minimum size limit
- Charter vessels: one-fish-per-person, four-fish-per-vessel, harvest seven days per week
- Private vessels: one-fish-per-person, two-fish-per-vessel, harvest Monday, Wednesday, Saturday
- Shore-based: one-fish-per-person

2016 State Measures

State	Size Limit	Bag Limit	Vessel Limit	Season Closure
Virginia	40-inch TL	1 fish	2 fish	Aug. 31
South Carolina; North of Edisto Island	33-inch FL	2 fish	None	June 20
South Carolina; South of Edisto Island	33-inch FL	1 fish June 1 – May 30	3 fish	June 20
Georgia	33-inch	2 fish	None	June 20

Cobia Management

- September 2016: South Atlantic Council approves Framework Amendment 4 to Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan for secretarial review
 - 36-inch fork length recreational minimum size limit
 - one-fish-per-person, up to six-fish-per-vessel recreational possession limit
 - Recreational accountability measures modified: reduction in vessel limit (no less than two fish) prior to reduction in season length, and only if stock annual catch limit is exceeded
 - Commercial possession limit of two-fish-per-person, up to six-fish-per-vessel
- Proposed rules in regulatory freeze

Cobia Management

- October 2016: Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission approves Cobia Public Information Document for scoping hearings
- February 2017: Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission reviewed public comments and directed staff to move forward with development of a complementary Fishery Management Plan

North Carolina Recreational Cobia Pounds Harvested

Wave	2015	2016
1 (Jan/Feb)	0	0
2 (Mar/Apr)	142	0
3 (May/Jun)	596,859	216,035
4 (Jul/Aug)	35,000	104,650
5 (Sep/Oct)	10,888	
6 (Nov/Dec)	18	
Total	642,907	320,685

* 2016 Recreational ACL = 620,000 pounds

2016 Recreational Cobia Pounds Harvested

Wave	State	Landings	Total Wave Landings
1 (Jan/Feb)	SC	51	51
2 (Mar/Apr)	GA	41	5,062
	SC	5,021	
3 (May/Jun)	GA	182	500,747
	SC	72,273	
	NC	216,035	
	VA	212,257	
4 (Jul/Aug)	NC	104,650	830,151
	VA	723,739	
	MD	1,762	
Total			1,336,011

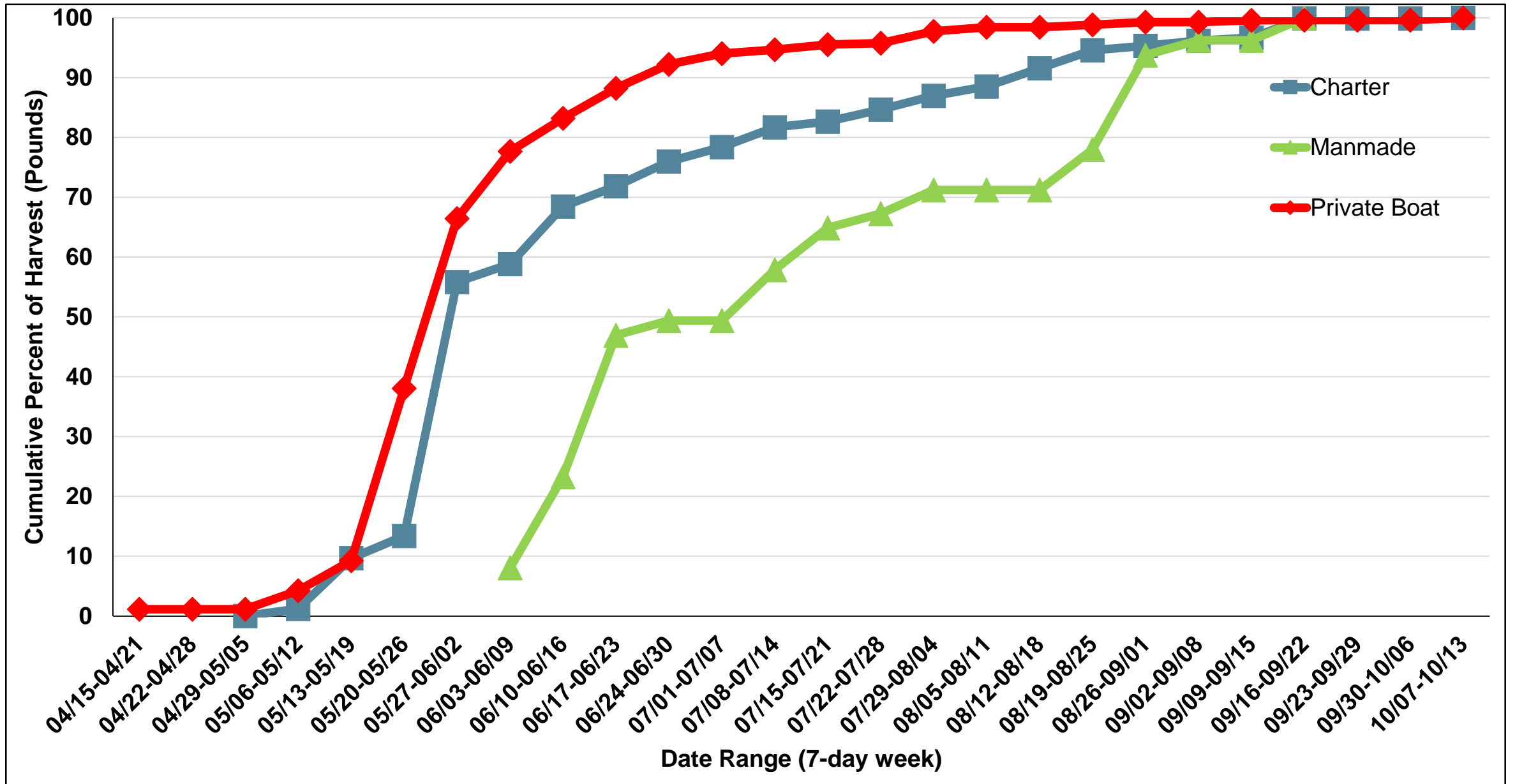
* 2016 Recreational ACL = 620,000 pounds

2017 Recreational Federal Closure

- NOAA Fisheries determined the Annual Catch Limit was exceeded in 2016, triggering the closure
- Effective Jan. 24, 2017 recreational harvest of cobia from the Atlantic stock (Georgia – New York) is closed
 - Remain closed until January 2018
 - Commercial harvest still open in federal waters
- Acknowledgement that the states will most likely keep the fishery open in their waters

2017 Analysis of Recreational Management Options

- Framework Amendment 4 to the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan
 - 36-inch fork length
 - One-fish-per-person-per-day
 - No more than six-fish-per-vessel
- Recreational cobia harvest averaged over last five years
- Analyzed percent reduction and projected landings for various season and vessel limits, by mode



Analysis of Recreational Management Options for 2017

Management Options	Vessel Limit							
	4 fish		3 fish		2 fish		1 fish	
	Reduction	Projected Landings	Reduction	Projected Landings	Reduction	Projected Landings	Reduction	Projected Landings
Charter - no closure	-2.50%	44,443	-3.80%	39,873	-5.70%	32,863	-8.60%	22,047
Charter vessel season of May 1 - August 31	-3.10%	42,423	-4.50%	37,332	-6.50%	29,948	-9.40%	19,080
Charter vessel season of May 15 - August 31	-3.30%	41,772	-4.60%	36,793	-6.60%	29,521	-9.50%	18,866
Charter vessels May 1 - July 31, then 1 fish/vessel for August	-4.00%	38,947	-5.40%	33,856	-7.40%	26,520	-10.20%	16,186
Private - no closure	-14.60%	231,664	-18.50%	217,178	-25.70%	190,541	-41.60%	131,858
Private vessel season of May 1 - August 31	-14.90%	230,447	-18.90%	215,961	-26.10%	189,325	-41.90%	130,704
Private vessel season of May 15 - August 31	-14.90%	230,447	-18.90%	215,961	-26.10%	189,325	-41.90%	130,704
Private vessels at May 1 - July 31, then 1 fish/vessel for August	-17.00%	222,954	-20.90%	208,468	-28.10%	181,832	-44.00%	123,210

Questions?

