



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration**

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
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DEC 22 2011

Mr. Carlos Farchette, Chair
Caribbean Fishery Management Council
268 Muñoz Rivera Avenue, Suite 1108
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00918-1920

Dear Mr. Farchette:

This letter advises you that NOAA Fisheries Service approved Amendment 6 to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI), Amendment 5 to the FMP for the Spiny Lobster Fishery of Puerto Rico and the USVI, Amendment 3 to the FMP for the Queen Conch Resources of Puerto Rico and the USVI, Amendment 3 to the FMP for Corals and Reef Associated Plants and Invertebrates of Puerto Rico and the USVI (2011 Caribbean Annual Catch Limit (ACL) Amendment; RIN 0648-BA62) on December 20, 2011.

The primary purpose of the 2011 Caribbean ACL Amendment is to establish ACLs and accountability measures (AMs) for species not subject to overfishing in the reef fish, spiny lobster, queen conch, and coral and reef associated plants and invertebrates FMPs. Additional goals of the 2011 Caribbean ACL Amendment include:

- Establish separate ACLs for recreational and commercial fisheries of Puerto Rico, and set stock ACLs for St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix.
- Modify/remove species from the stock complexes for aquarium trade species and conch.
- Define the sub-boundaries of the U.S. Caribbean exclusive economic zone for application of AMs.
- Allocate ACLs among the three U.S. Caribbean Island groups.
- Establish recreational bag limits for the reef fish and spiny lobster.
- Specify framework provisions.

The amendment will complete the process of establishing ACLs and AMs for all federally managed species in the U.S. Caribbean with the exception of sea grasses. The original Coral FMP set the optimum yield for sea grasses, stony coral, octocorals, and live-rock at zero (0). Corals that are contained within the Coral FMP, and that are not described as aquarium trade species (stony corals, octocorals and live rock), are Caribbean prohibited corals. Federal regulations state that Caribbean prohibited corals may not be fished for or possessed in or from the Caribbean EEZ. Therefore, a functional ACL of zero will be considered for these prohibited species. Additionally, the harvest prohibition serves as a functional AM to manage the ACL.



There are no regulations prohibiting the harvest of sea grasses from the Caribbean EEZ. The Council will have to take future action to address sea grasses to bring the Coral FMP into compliance with the MSA.

The final rule implementing the 2011 Caribbean ACL Amendment is under review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Miles M. Croom". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "M" and "C".

for Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator