



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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September 12, 2013
FB13-072

NOAA Fisheries Announces a Final Rule to Modify the Commercial Trip Limit for the Harvest of Queen Conch in Federal Waters of the U.S. Caribbean

Small Entity Compliance Guide

NOAA Fisheries announces a final rule implementing Regulatory Amendment 2 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Queen Conch Resources of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). The final rule published in the *Federal Register* on September 12, 2013 (78 FR 56171), with an effective date of **October 15, 2013**.

This final rule revises the commercial trip limit for the harvest of queen conch in U.S. Caribbean federal waters to be compatible with the trip limit in USVI territorial waters. Harvest and possession of queen conch in federal waters is limited to the area east of 64°34'W longitude which includes Lang Bank to the east of St. Croix, USVI.

The final rule changes the commercial trip limit in federal waters to 200 queen conch per vessel per day from the current 150 queen conch per licensed commercial fisher per day. Compatibility with the USVI's commercial regulations is expected to reduce confusion among fishers and increase law enforcement efficiency. The recreational bag limit for the harvest of queen conch in U.S. Caribbean federal waters will remain the same. This recreational bag limit consists of three queen conch per person per day, and if more than four persons are on board, a maximum of 12 queen conch per vessel per day.

The final rule applies to the whole U.S. Caribbean exclusive economic zone but will only affect the management subzone of St. Croix, which is the only area in federal waters where fishing for queen conch is currently allowed. The federal waters around

Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, and St. John remain closed for all fishing of queen conch.

This bulletin serves as a Small Entity Compliance Guide, complying with section 212 of the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996.

This bulletin provides only a summary of the information regarding the existing regulations. Any discrepancies between this bulletin and the regulations as published in the *Federal Register* will be resolved in favor of the *Federal Register*.

Electronic copies of the regulatory amendment and the final rule may be obtained from the NOAA Fisheries Web site:

http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/caribbean/conch/reg_am2/index.html or the Caribbean Fishery Management Council Web site: <http://www.caribbeanfmc.com/>.

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