

Regulatory Amendment 6 to the U.S. Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands: Triggering Accountability Measures in the Puerto Rico Exclusive Economic Zone



Triggering Accountability Measures

Draft Amendment/Environmental Assessment



April 2017



Purpose

Revise how accountability measures are triggered for the Puerto Rico reef fish fishery, to increase the likelihood that optimum yield (OY) is achieved, while maintaining sector-specific accountability measures, and to minimize, to the extent practicable, adverse socio-economic effects of accountability measure-based closures.

Action and Management Alternatives

Action: Revise the trigger for implementing accountability measure-based fishing season reductions for stocks and stock complexes in the reef fish fishery in Puerto Rico exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Alternative 1

Alternative 1: No action. The AM for a stock or stock complex would be triggered for either the recreational or commercial fishing sector if that sector's applicable annual catch limit (ACL) for the stock/complex is exceeded.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2: The AM for a stock or stock complex would be triggered for either the recreational or commercial fishing sector if that sector's applicable ACL for a stock/complex is exceeded and the combined recreational and commercial (i.e., total) ACL for that stock/complex is exceeded.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3: The AM for a stock or stock complex would be triggered for either the recreational or commercial fishing sector, if that sector's applicable ACL for the stock/complex is exceeded and the total ACL for that stock/complex is exceeded. If the sector-specific ACL is exceeded, but the total recreational and commercial ACL for the stock or stock complex is not exceeded, the AM would not be triggered except if, based on the most recent Status of U.S. Fisheries Report to Congress, the stock/complex is determined to be:

- **Sub-Alternative 3a.** Undergoing overfishing
- **Sub-Alternative 3b.** Overfished

Physical Effects

- **Alt 1** – Highest frequency of AM based closures. Less fishing effort indicates less physical effects.
- **Alt 2** – Less AM based closures compared to Alts 1 and 3. Potentially more fishing effort. Greatest chance of gear and anchor interactions with the sea floor.
- **Alt 3** – Depending on the stock status determination, effects would be the same as Alternative 1 (undergoing overfishing or overfished) or the same as Alternative 2 (no status determinations).

In general, no direct effects expected. Indirect effects depend on changes in fishing effort under different alternatives.

Biological and Ecological Effects

- **Alt 1** – Current closures resulting in less fishing effort but potentially more regulatory discards during closures than Alts 2 and 3.
- **Alt 2** – Less closures but greatest chances of achieving the OY. Still adhering to the ACL which is set at a level considered to be sustainable for the stock. **No negative effects expected.**
- **Alt 3** –
 - **Sub-alt 3a** (Undergoing overfishing) – Greater benefits than Alt 2 and Sub-alt 3b because results in more closures. Still adhering to ACL. No negative effects.
 - **Sub-alt 3b** (Overfished) – Greater benefits than Alt 2. Greater benefits than Sub-alt 3a because overfished status occurs less often than overfishing status. Still adhering to ACL. No negative effects.

Economic Effects

- **Alt 1** – Economic benefits are less than under Alts 2 and 3 because landings and revenues are less than they could be.
- **Alt 2** – **Greatest economic benefits** due to increased possibility of capturing the entire ACL
- **Alt 3** – Less closures than Alt 1 but more than Alt 2
 - **Sub-alt 3a** (Undergoing overfishing) – Greater economic benefits than Alt 1 but less than Alt 2 and Alt 3b
 - **Sub-alt 3b** (Overfished) – Greater economic benefits than Alt 1 but less than Alt 2. Greater economic benefits than Sub-alt 3a because overfished status occurs less often than overfishing status

Social Effects

- **Alt 1** – Highest potential for lost fishing opportunities compared to Alts 2 and 3 because of higher frequency of closures.
- **Alt 2** – Greatest possibility of increasing fishing opportunities. **Greatest social benefits.**
- **Alt 3** – Greater possibility of fishing opportunities than Alt 1 but less than Alt 2
 - **Sub-alt 3a** (Undergoing overfishing) – Greater fishing opportunities than Alt 1 but less than Alt 2 and Alt 3b.
 - **Sub-alt 3b** (Overfished) – Greater fishing opportunities than Alt 1 but less than Alt 2. Greater benefits than Sub-alt 3a because overfished status occurs less often than overfishing status.

Administrative Effects

- **Alt 1** – Moderate administrative burden (for law enforcement) due to more closures than under Alts 2 and 3. No rulemaking required.
- **Alt 2** – **Least administrative burden** due to decreased number of closures. Require rulemaking to modify trigger.
- **Alt 3** – Slightly more administrative burden than Alt 2 but less than Alt 1 due to less closures. Require rulemaking to modify trigger.

Effects Summary

- **Physical Effects**

- No negative effects expected

- **Biological and Ecological Effects**

- No negative effects expected

- **Economic Effects**

- Alt 2 has greatest economic benefits due to greater chance of capturing the entire ACL and OY

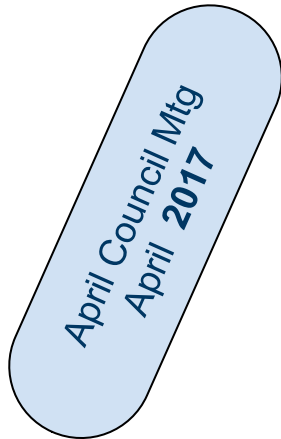
- **Social Effects**

- Alt 2 offers the greatest possibility of increased fishing opportunities

- **Administrative Effects**

- Alt 2 has least administrative burden due to less closures

Draft Timeline



- Review and identify preferred alternative(s)
- Approve draft amendment for public hearings
- Hold public hearings
- Revise draft amendment as necessary and deem codified text
- Approve amendment for Secretarial Review

Next Steps:

- Review and identify preferred alternative(s)
- Approve draft amendment for Public Hearings