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SERO

# Recreational Bag Limit for the Yellowtail Snapper under the St. Croix Fishery Management Plan

170<sup>th</sup> Caribbean Fishery Management Council Meeting  
August 11-12, 2020



## At the June 23-24 CFMC meeting:

Develop an amendment to the St. Croix FMP (once implemented) to modify the current recreational bag limit for the snapper-grouper-parrotfish aggregate that would allow yellowtail snapper to be managed with a separate bag limit specific to the species.

# Background



- Yellowtail snapper, *Ocyurus chrysurus*, is a very important component of U.S. Caribbean fisheries for both the commercial and recreational sectors.
- Included for management since 1985 (Reef Fish FMP). Managed with a min size limit.
- In St. Croix, the species is managed under the the Snapper Complex of the Reef Fish FMP for annual catch limits and monitoring.
- Under the St. Croix FMP (pending implementation) species will be managed as an individual stock with a single ACL.
- Assessed in 2005 (SEDAR 8) – data insufficient, did not provide stock status determination. Included in SEDAR 46 (data limited stocks) only for Puerto Rico.
- [Stock Status as of March 31, 2020](#): Caribbean Snappers (including yellowtail snapper) are not undergoing overfishing and overfished status is unknown
- In the St. Croix FMP – Productivity: Moderate/High; Susceptibility – Low/Moderate



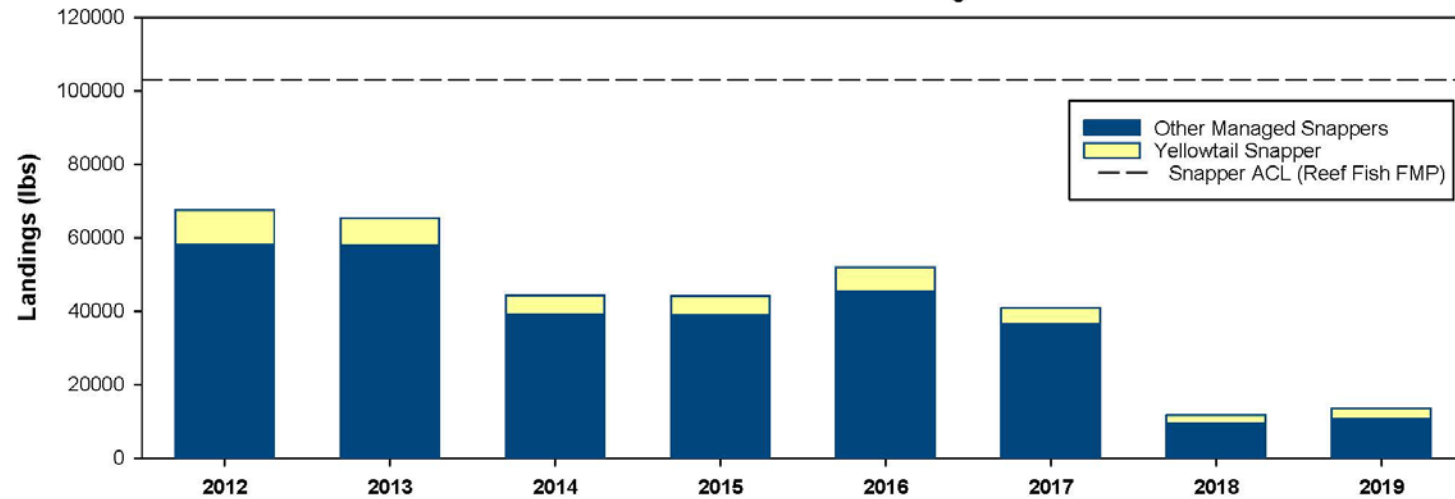
# Current Management Measures Applicable to the Yellowtail Snapper

- Recreational Bag limit for groupers, snappers, and parrotfishes combined:  
5 per person per day or, if 3 or more persons are aboard, 15 per vessel per day;  
but not to exceed 2 parrotfish per person per day or 6 parrotfish per vessel per day.
  - Implemented through the 2010 Caribbean ACL Amendment regulations for species that at the time were undergoing overfishing
  - No compatible bag limit regulations in territorial waters of PR or USVI
- Size Limit:  
Min size for all harvest of yellowtail in federal waters only 12 inch (30.5 cm) TL  
(Puerto Rico has a min size of 10.5 in FL)
- Annual Catch Limit and Accountability Measures
  - Will be managed in the island-based FMPs with individual stock ACL
  - No recreational landings are collected for the species in the USVI

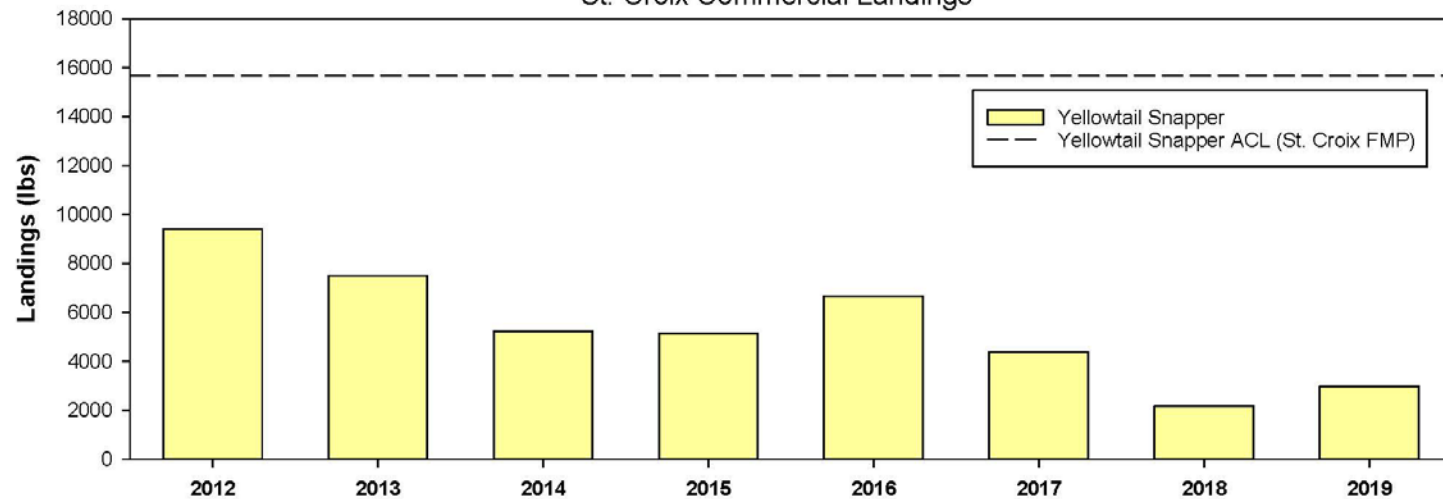
Measures will be carried over to all the three island-based FMPs



St. Croix Commercial Landings



St. Croix Commercial Landings



# Rationale

## Fishers interested in a separate bag limit because:

- Yellowtail snapper is fished differently than other reef fish species, with different techniques
  - Fishers can be selective by using different chum strategies, choosing locations or distance from hard bottoms, working with tides, hook sizes, or hook weights.
- Current limit appears to be too restrictive; could support higher numbers of yellowtail
- Produces minimum bycatch
- Fish are less likely affected by barotrauma, because they are hooked higher in the water column when the chum attracts the school.
- If species is abundant and desired by locals, this is an opportunity to move fishing away from classic bottom fishing which is multi-species, less selective, and has more interactions with the bottom.



# St. Croix Yellowtail Recreational Fishing Characteristics

- **Recreational and commercial fishers use same technique:**
  - Fishing with yo-yo or rod and reel (no bottom tending gear used).
  - All fishing is done by anchoring approx. 30 m deep and paying out scope on the anchor line until they drift off the shelf edge.
  - Anchor using homemade grappling hooks made with rebar steel for easy retrieval which also minimizes damage to corals.
  - No lead weight; fisher will pay out the line when the current is pulling off the shelf edge in order to float the bait in the area where the fish may be feeding on the chum line.
  - Bait: Fishers in STX use chum to raise fish from bottom; natural bait preferred, sardines, anchovies alive or dead.



# St. Croix Yellowtail Recreational Fishing Characteristics *(Cont.)*

- No barotrauma because fish rise just to below surface or mid-water column feeding on the chum line.
- Bycatch in STX: mutton snapper, occasionally crevalle jack and blue runner.
- In STX, mostly a nighttime fishery.
  - Dependency on right moon phase and currents
- Use of historical locations for yellowtail snapper fishing. All STX locations are off the shelf edge.
- No headboats; charters specialize in pelagics; occasional personal fishing/tourists.





## Potential Action:

Separate bag limit for the yellowtail snapper under the St. Croix FMP.

## Possible Options:

- No action – keep yellowtail in the snapper-grouper-parrotfish recreational bag limit
- Recommend a separate recreational bag limit for the yellowtail snapper, for example:
  - 15 per fisher or 30 yellowtail max per boat
  - 10 per fisher or 20 max per boat
  - Other

## To consider when setting bag limits:

- No monitoring of recreational landings in the USVI at this time (overfishing concerns).
  - Effects on assumptions of the sustainable yield level (SYL)
- Enforcement – particularly for a nighttime fishery
- Lack of compatibility with territorial regulations
- Potential for illegal sale of fish if higher limits are selected?



# Next Steps:

- Develop an Options Paper for Dec 2020 meeting or April 2021 meeting to amend the St. Croix FMP.
- Are Puerto Rico and/or St. Thomas/St. John interested in pursuing a similar action?

## Examples of information to include in a potential amendment:

- Review of any information available for the species (SEAMAP, SEDAR, research, etc.).
- Information about the yellowtail snapper fishery, for both recreational and commercial fishing (e.g., how many fishers, how much fishing is in federal waters).
- Information from the USVI recreational fishing license
- Market information (price per pound; demand for the species).
- Other

# Questions?



# Additional Information

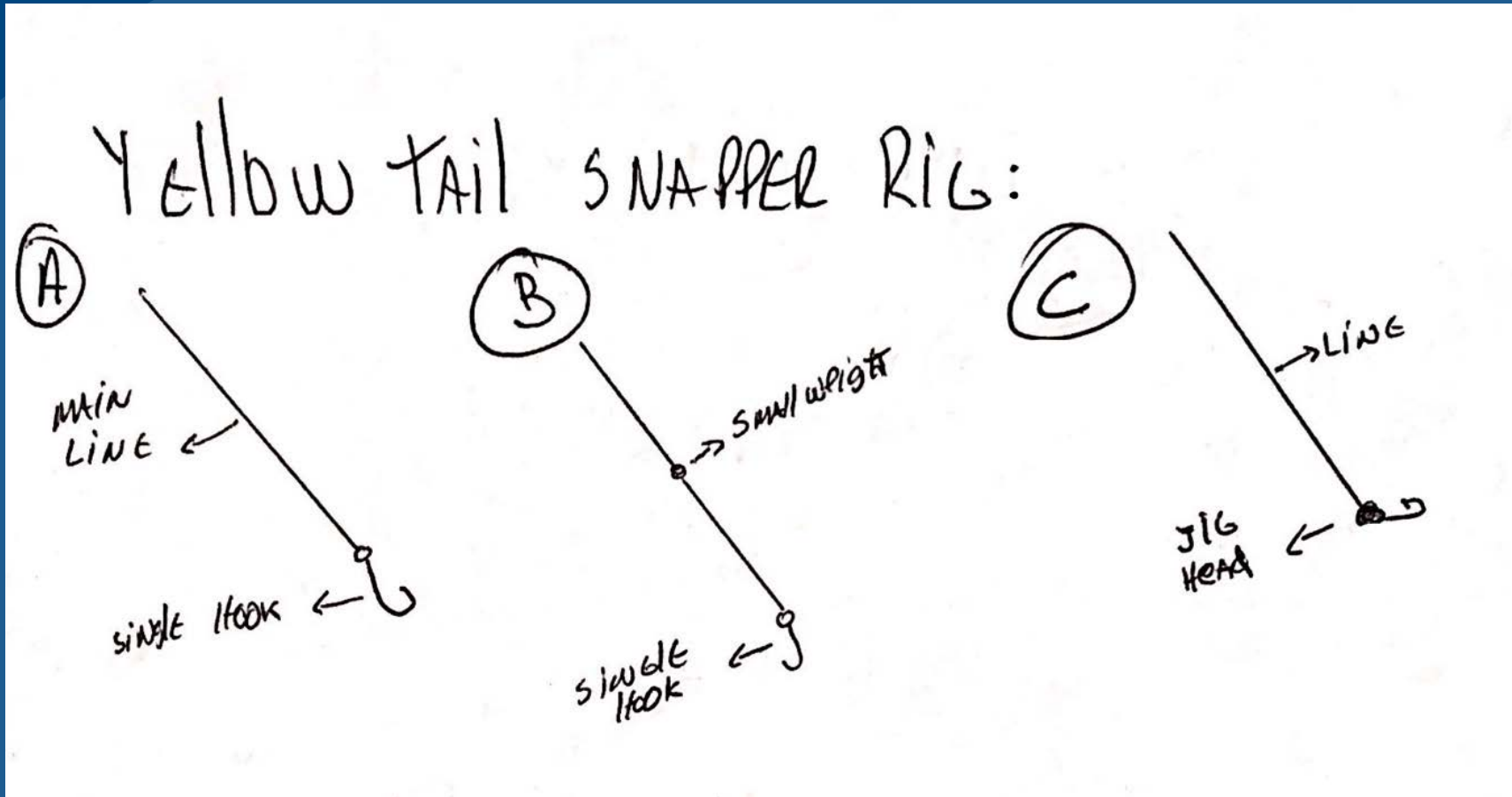


# Puerto Rico Yellowtail Snapper Fishing Characteristics

- Specific fishing technique that fishers need to dedicate time and effort
- Minimum bycatch
  - Common associated species include blue runner, mutton snapper, triggerfish, and others. Fish are less likely affected by barotrauma, because they are hooked higher on the water column when the chum attract the school.
- Use a “J” hook
- Use natural bait (dead or live), mostly sardines and anchovies.
  - Experienced fishers use chum
- It’s possible to choose places that produce a specific desired size
- Selectivity can be addressed by using different chum strategies, choosing location or distance from the hard bottom, working with the tides, with hook size or hook weight.
- Effective fishers anchor away from the reef (most of the time people are anchoring on the sand ring around hard bottom or coral reefs) and attract the fish with chum.

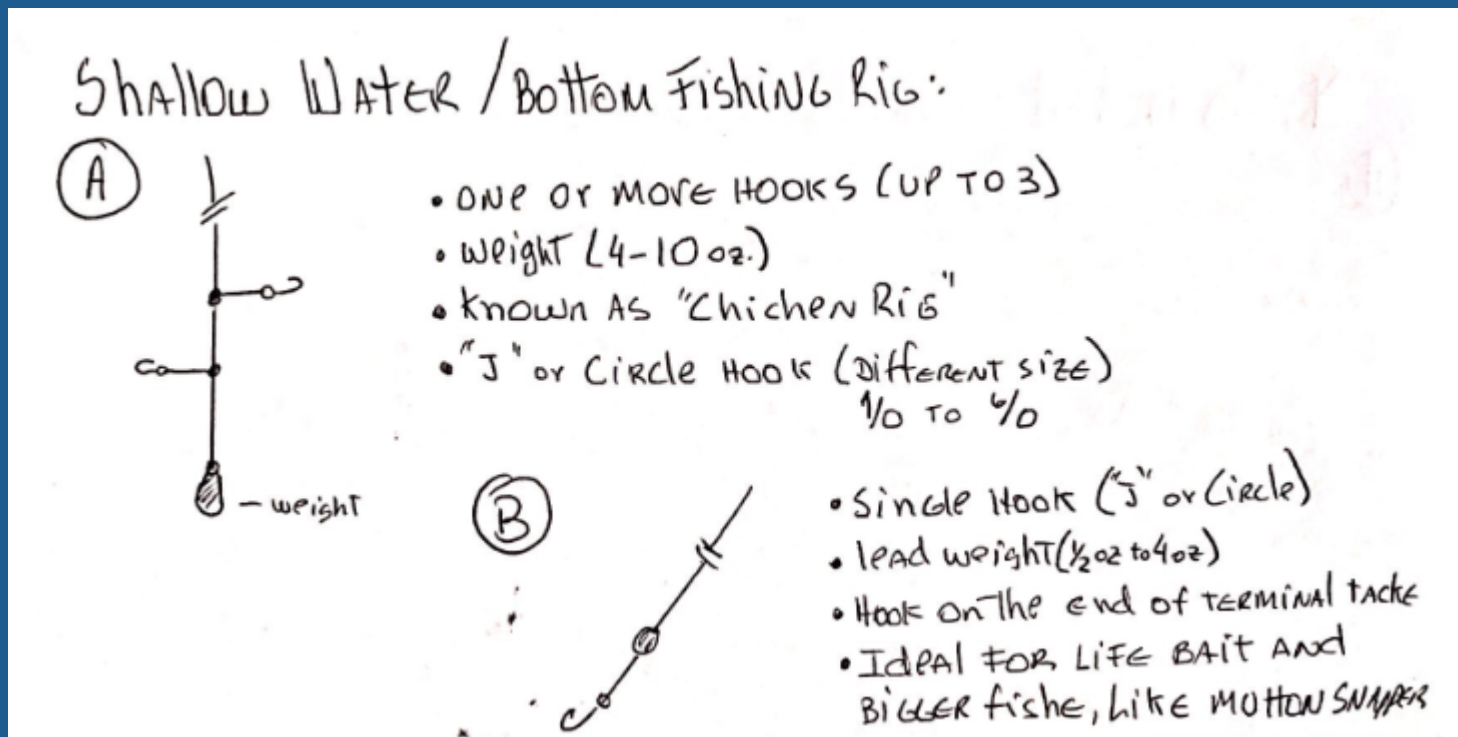


# Bottom Fishing Rigs: Yellowtail Snapper



# Puerto Rico Shallow-water Fishing Characteristics

- Target multi-species, less selective than other bottom fishing methods
- Use natural baits (live or dead)
- Use "J" hooks and/or circle hooks
- Use 1 to 3 hooks
- Lead weight (1 to 10 oz)



# Puerto Rico Deep-water Snapper Fishing Characteristics

- RECREATIONAL
  - Use rod and reel gear and fish from 280' and 450' (Some fish deeper using recreational electric reels that are also used to fish for swordfish, deep-water squids and others.
    - Mostly use circle hooks
  - Target mainly silk and blackfin snapper
- COMMERCIAL
  - Use mainly commercial electric manual or reels and fish deeper (660' to 1800')
    - They also use a free floating DWS/buoy with multiple hooks (10 to 30 circle hooks)
  - Target mainly queen, wenchman, cardinal, silk, vermilion snappers and some species of deep-water grouper. Incidental catch includes deep-water sharks, tilefish and others.
  - Commercial fishers and Charters use "break away" system and a weaker tag line connected to the weight to protect the bottom habitat. The break away system makes the rig snag-free and prevents the loss of the very expensive rig on the bottom.
    - This technique has an higher degree of selectivity when compared to shallow-water bottom fishing. Selectivity can be adjusted by changing hook size, light color, hook distance from the bottom, and kind of bait.



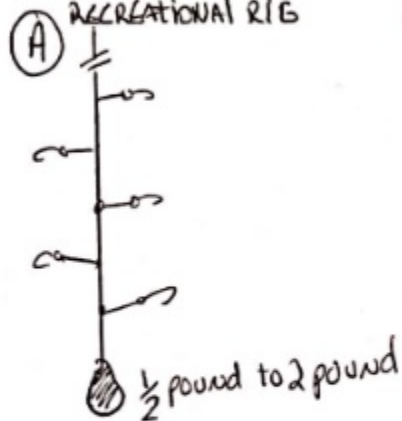


# Puerto Rico Deep-water Snapper Fishing Characteristics

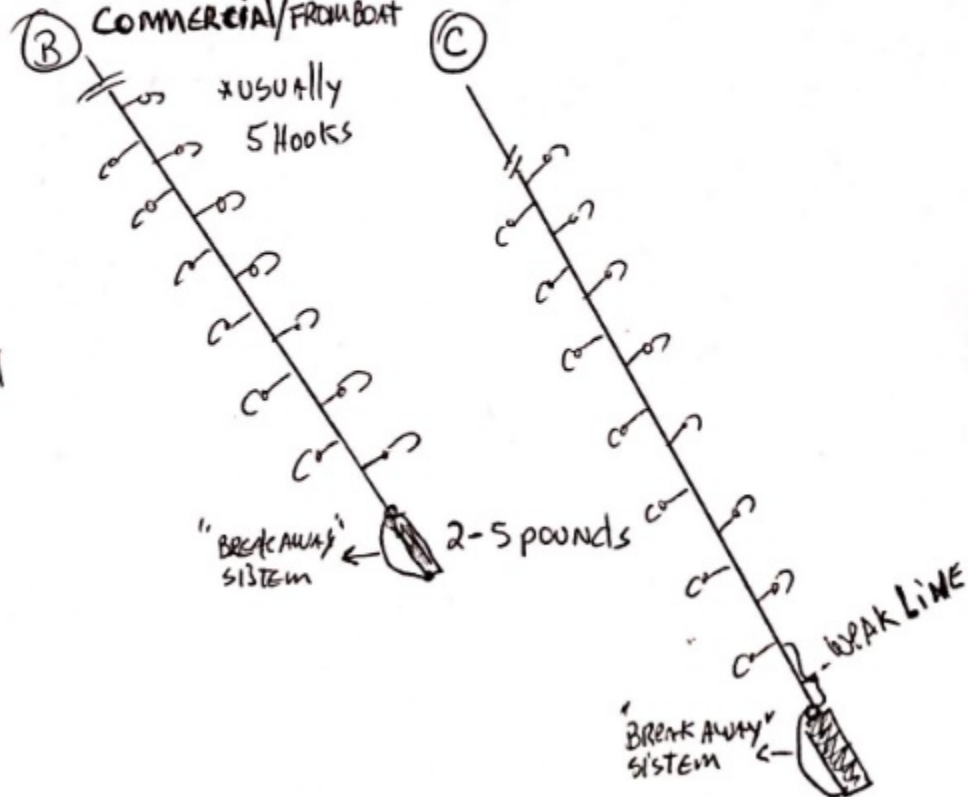
## DEEP WATER SNAPPER RIG

- USED BY RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL FISHERS
- ROD AND REEL RECREATIONAL FISHERS FISH SHALLOWER (250'-450') MOSTLY TARGETING SILK SNAPPER, BLACKFIN SNAPPER AND OTHERS

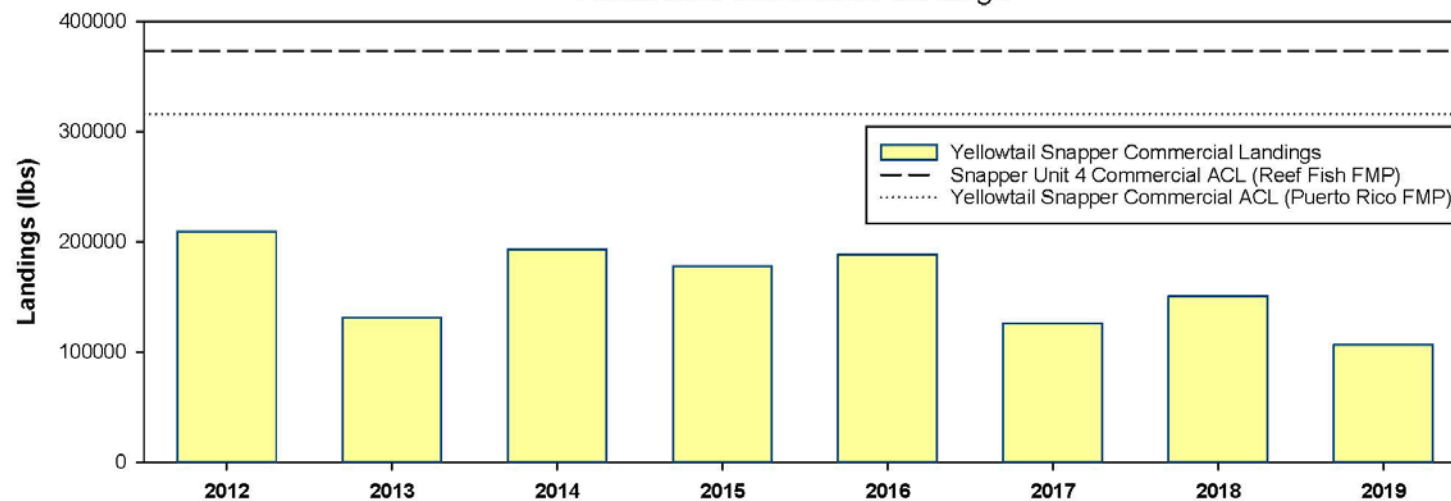
RECREATIONAL RIG



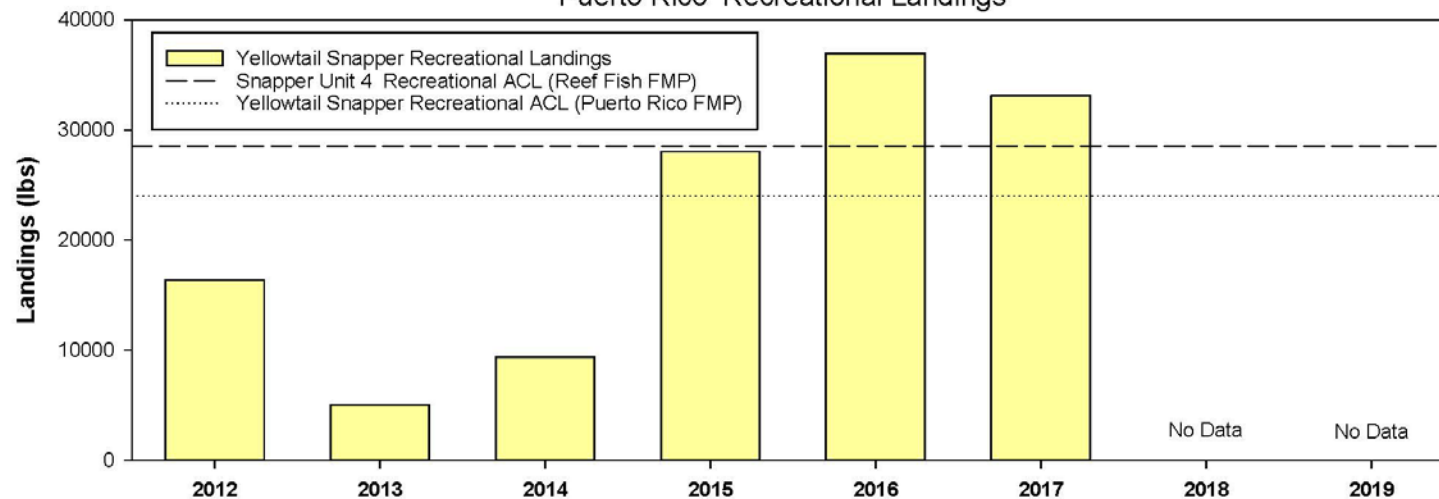
COMMERCIAL/FROM BOAT



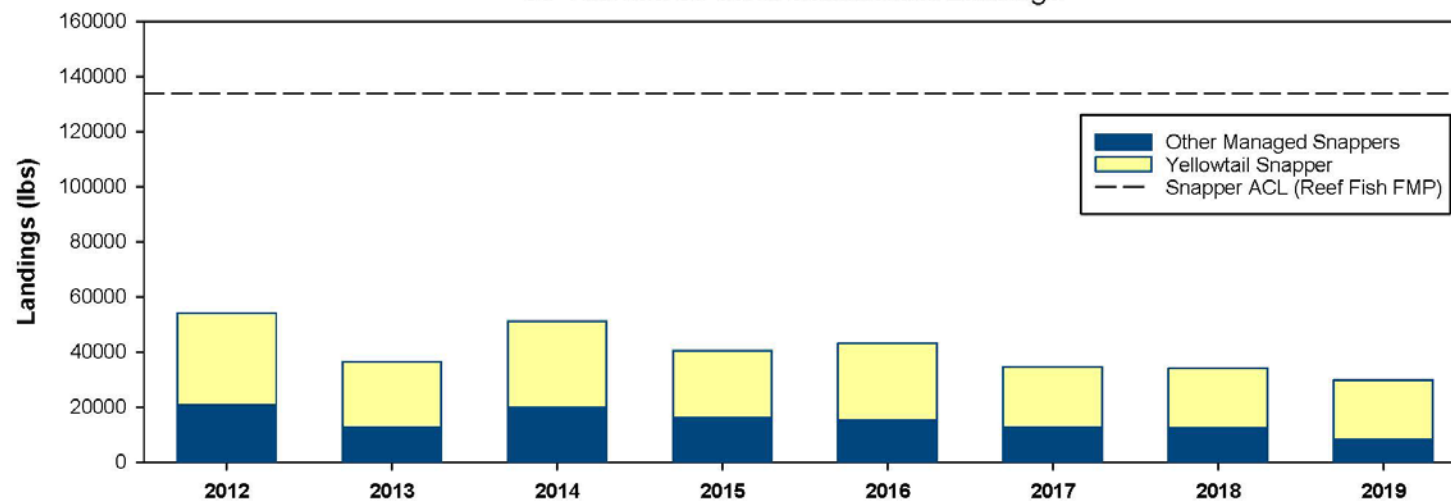
Puerto Rico Commercial Landings



Puerto Rico Recreational Landings



St. Thomas/St. John Commercial Landings



St. Thomas/St. John Commercial Landings

