

**Modifications to the Buoy Gear Definition for the Harvest of  
Managed Reef Fish in Federal Waters of Puerto Rico,  
St. Croix, and St. Thomas/St. John**

**Draft Options Paper**

For a Generic Amendment to the Comprehensive Fishery Management  
Plans for Puerto Rico, St. Thomas/St. John, and St. Croix

**November 2020**



# Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	2
List of Tables .....	2
1. Background .....	3
1.1 Issue to be addressed in a proposed amendment to the island-based FMPs .....	4
2. Action and Potential Options .....	5
3. References .....	7
Appendix A. List of Managed Reef Fish Included in Each of the Island-based FMPs .....	8
Appendix B. History of Management .....	10

## List of Tables

<b>Table 1.1.</b> Authorized gear types for the commercial sector of the Reef Fish Fishery in each of the island-based FMPs. ....	3
---	---

# 1. Background

At the 170<sup>th</sup> Caribbean Fishery Management Council (Council) regular meeting in August 2020, the Council requested staff begin work on an amendment to each of the Puerto Rico, St. Thomas/St. John, and St. Croix fishery management plans (FMP) (island-based FMPs), once implemented, that would allow for the use of a specific hook and line gear type currently used to fish commercially for deep water reef fish in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). At the same meeting, the Council also tasked staff to consider whether gill and trammel nets or any other applicable gear should be included as authorized gear types when fishing for certain species managed under each of the island-based FMPs. This Options Paper pertains only to the use of specific hook and line gear (buoy gear) and lists potential options to include and evaluate in an amendment to each of the island-based FMPs to consider changes to the definition of buoy gear used to fish for managed reef fish. Consideration of other gear types will be addressed in the near future through a separate amendment to the island-based FMPs.

The commercial Longline/Hook and Line Fishery for managed reef fish in each of the Puerto Rico, St. Thomas/St. John, and St. Croix FMPs includes longline and hook and line (50 CFR 600.725(V) gear table) (Table 1.1). Appendix A lists the species included under the Reef Fish category of each the island-based FMPs. Deep-water snappers (e.g., queen snapper, cardinal snapper) are currently included for management under this category. The island-based FMPs were approved by the Secretary of Commerce on September 22, 2020 and regulations to implement the plans are under development. The island-based FMPs are expected to be in effect in 2021.

**Table 1.1.** Authorized gear types for the commercial sector of the Reef Fish Fishery in each of the island-based FMPs.

Reef Fish Fishery	Gear Type
Commercial Longline/hook and line fishery	Longline, hook and line
Commercial Trap/pot fishery	Trap, pot
Other commercial fishery	Spear

\*The gear table will be updated in the regulations implemented the island-based FMPs.

Federal regulations at 50 CFR Part 622.2 define **hook and line** as automatic reel, bandit gear, buoy gear, handline, longline, and rod and reel. Hook and line gear types are defined as follows:

*Automatic reel* means a reel that remains attached to a vessel when in use from which a line and attached hook(s) are deployed. The line is payed out from and retrieved on the reel electrically or hydraulically.

*Bandit gear* means a rod and reel that remain attached to a vessel when in use from which a line and attached hook(s) are deployed. The line is payed out from and retrieved on the reel manually, electrically, or hydraulically.

*Buoy gear* means fishing gear that fishes vertically in the water column that consists of a single drop line suspended from a float, from which no more than 10 hooks can be connected between the buoy and the terminal end, and the terminal end contains a weight that is no more than 10 lb (4.5 kg). The drop line can be rope (hemp, manila, cotton or other natural fibers; nylon, polypropylene, spectra or other synthetic material) or monofilament, but must not be cable or wire. The gear is free-floating and not connected to other gear or the vessel. The drop line must be no greater than 2 times the depth of the water being fished. All hooks must be attached to the drop line no more than 30 ft (9.1 m) from the weighted terminal end. These hooks may be attached directly to the drop line; attached as snoods (defined as an offshoot line that is directly spliced, tied or otherwise connected to the drop line), where each snood has a single terminal hook; or as gangions (defined as an offshoot line connected to the drop line with some type of detachable clip), where each gangion has a single terminal hook.

*Handline* means a line with attached hook(s) that is tended directly by hand.

*Longline* means a line that is deployed horizontally to which gangions and hooks are attached. A longline may be a bottom longline, i.e., designed for use on the bottom, or a pelagic longline, i.e., designed for use off the bottom. The longline hauler may be manually, electrically, or hydraulically operated.

*Rod and reel* means a rod and reel unit that is not attached to a vessel, or, if attached, is readily removable, from which a line and attached hook(s) are deployed. The line is payed out from and retrieved on the reel manually, electrically, or hydraulically.

## 1.1 Issue to be addressed in a proposed amendment to the island-based FMPs

In Puerto Rico and the USVI, commercial fishermen harvesting deep-water snappers (e.g., queen and cardinal snappers) have traditionally used a gear type locally known as “cala con boya” in

Puerto Rico and as “deep-drop buoy gear” in the USVI. Although this locally used commercial fishing gear type is very similar to the buoy gear defined in federal regulations applicable to Caribbean fisheries described above, it differs in the number of hooks that are allowed to be used with the gear. The buoy gear type defined in 50 CFR Part 622.2 cannot contain more than 10 hooks connected between the buoy and the terminal end, while the local deep-water reef fish buoy gear typically can contain up to 25 hooks connected between the buoy and the terminal end. The use of any gear not listed as authorized for the fishery is prohibited (50 CFR 600.725(v)). Therefore, this gear type cannot be used by fishermen participating in the commercial reef fish fishery until it is added as an allowable gear type under the island-based FMPs.

### **Purpose and Need (DRAFT)**

The purpose of this amendment is to modify the definition of buoy gear as it applies to the commercial sector of the longline/hook and line fishery for managed reef fish in each of the island-based FMPs to allow for the use of a specific buoy gear type traditionally used in the U.S. Caribbean to fish for deep-water fish (e.g. snappers).

The need is to ensure that commercial fishermen can use the gear type traditionally used to harvest deep-water reef fish in the U.S. Caribbean.

## **2. Action and Potential Options**

A different option can be selected for each island management area.

**Option 1 (No action).** The current gear types authorized under the commercial longline/hook and line fishery for managed reef fish in the FMP: automatic reel, bandit gear, buoy gear, handline, longline, and rod and reel would remain as specified in 50 CFR Part 622. The current definition of buoy gear would be retained.

- Under this option, no changes would be made to the list of allowable gear types or how they are defined under the commercial longline/hook and line fishery for managed reef fish. The gear type currently used in Puerto Rico and the USVI to fish for deep water reef fish (snappers) would continue to not be allowed in federal waters to harvest managed reef fish. Fishermen would need to make arrangements to fish under the current definition, which would require them to reduce the number of hooks used to 10.

**Option 2.** Retain the current gear types authorized under the commercial longline/hook and line fishery for managed reef fish in the FMP: automatic reel, bandit gear, buoy gear, handline, longline, and rod and reel. Modify the definition of buoy gear as it applies to the longline/hook and line fishery for managed reef fish to allow the use of up to 25 hooks connected between the buoy and the terminal end.

- Similar to Option 1, this option would not change the list of allowable gear types under the commercial longline/hook and line fishery for managed reef fish, but would modify the definition of buoy gear under this fishery so that it can include the configuration of the buoy gear type used by fishermen in Puerto Rico and the USVI to harvest deep-water fish (snappers) in both territorial and federal waters.
- The applicable regulations could include a specific definition, which would be the same definition of buoy gear but with a maximum of 25 hooks instead of a maximum of 10 hooks.
- In the future, if a federal permit is desired, the buoy gear for managed Caribbean reef fish could be re-defined to be specific to deep water snappers, and the deep water snapper category would be defined to mean specific species.

**Option 3.** If needed, same as Option 2 but proposing the use of less # of hooks.

- An option 3 may not be necessary as the 25 hooks proposed in Option 2 are a max, the use of less hooks could be evaluated under Option 2.

### 3. References

CFMC (Caribbean Fishery Management Council). 1985. Fishery management plan, final environmental impact statement, and draft regulatory impact review for the shallow-water reef fish fishery of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Caribbean Fishery Management Council, San Juan, Puerto Rico. 69pp. + Appendices.

CFMC (Caribbean Fishery Management Council). 2019a. Comprehensive Fishery Management Plan for the Puerto Rico Exclusive Economic Zone, environmental assessment, regulatory impact review, and fishery impact statement. Caribbean Fishery Management Council, San Juan, Puerto Rico. 637 pp.

CFMC (Caribbean Fishery Management Council). 2019b. Comprehensive Fishery Management Plan for the St. Thomas/ St. John Exclusive Economic Zone, environmental assessment, regulatory impact review, and fishery impact statement. Caribbean Fishery Management Council, San Juan, Puerto Rico. 507 pp.

CFMC (Caribbean Fishery Management Council). 2019c. Comprehensive Fishery Management Plan for the St. Croix Exclusive Economic Zone, environmental assessment, regulatory impact review, and fishery impact statement. Caribbean Fishery Management Council, San Juan, Puerto Rico. 509 pp.

CFMC. 2020a. 170<sup>th</sup> Meeting Verbatim Transcripts. August 11-12, 2020.  
[https://caribbeanfmc.com/meetings/CFMC%20MEETINGS/170\\_CFMC\\_Regular\\_Virtual\\_Meeting\\_August\\_2020/170th\\_CFMC\\_Verbatim\\_Transcripts\\_August\\_2020.pdf](https://caribbeanfmc.com/meetings/CFMC%20MEETINGS/170_CFMC_Regular_Virtual_Meeting_August_2020/170th_CFMC_Verbatim_Transcripts_August_2020.pdf)

CFMC. 2020b. After the meeting documents, Font translated letter. 170<sup>th</sup> Caribbean Fishery Management Council Regular Meeting. August 11-12, 2020.  
[https://caribbeanfmc.com/After\\_the\\_Meeting\\_Documents/170\\_After\\_the\\_Meet\\_Docs/Traduccion\\_carta\\_pescador\\_ago2020.pdf](https://caribbeanfmc.com/After_the_Meeting_Documents/170_After_the_Meet_Docs/Traduccion_carta_pescador_ago2020.pdf)

## Appendix A. List of Managed Reef Fish Included in Each of the Island-based FMPs

### St. Croix Reef Fish

- **Snappers:** black, blackfin, silk, vermilion, queen, lane, gray, mutton, schoolmaster, yellowtail
- **Groupers:** Nassau, goliath, graysby, coney, red hind, rock hind, black, red, tiger, yellowfin, misty
- **Parrotfishes:** blue, midnight, rainbow, queen, princess, redtail, stoplight, redband, striped, redfin
- **Surgeonfishes:** blue tang, ocean surgeonfish, doctorfish
- **Triggerfishes:** queen
- **Angelfishes:** queen, grey, French
- **Grunts:** white grunt, bluestriped
- **Squirrelfish:** longspine squirrelfish

### St. Thomas/St John Reef Fish

- **Snappers:** black, blackfin, silk, vermilion, queen, lane, mutton, yellowtail
- **Groupers:** Nassau, goliath, coney, red hind, black, red, tiger, yellowfin, *yellowmouth*\*, yellowedge, misty
- **Parrotfishes:** blue, midnight, rainbow, queen, princess, redtail, stoplight, redband, striped, redfin
- **Surgeonfishes:** blue tang, ocean surgeonfish, doctorfish
- **Triggerfishes:** queen
- **Wrasses:** hogfish
- **Angelfishes:** queen, grey, French
- **Grunts:** white grunt, bluestriped, margate
- **Jacks:** Blue runner
- **Porgies:** jolthead, saucereye, sheepshead, sea bream

\* *New to management*

# Puerto Rico Reef Fish

- **Snappers:** black, blackfin, silk, vermilion, wenchman, cardinal, queen, lane, mutton, dog, schoolmaster, yellowtail,  cubera\*
- **Groupers:** Nassau, goliath, coney, graysby, black, red, tiger, yellowfin,  yellowmouth\*, yellowedge, misty, red hind, rock hind
- **Parrotfishes:** blue, midnight, rainbow, queen, princess, redtail, stoplight, redband, striped
- **Surgeonfishes:** blue tang, ocean surgeonfish, doctorfish
- **Triggerfishes:** ocean, queen,  gray\*
- **Wrasses:** hogfish, puddingwife, Spanish hogfish
- **Angelfishes:** queen, grey, French
- **Grunts:** white grunt
- **Jacks:**  crevalle jack\*,  African pompano\*,  rainbow runner\*

\* New to management

## Appendix B. History of Management

Prior to the development of the island-based FMPs, reef fish in the U.S. Caribbean were managed under the Reef Fish FMP (CMFC 1985), as amended. The history of management actions taken to date under the Reef Fish FMP are summarized in Appendix C.1 of each the island-based FMPs.

On June 26, 2020, a **Notice of Availability** (NOA; 85 FR 38350) was published requesting comments on the three island-based FMPs. The Puerto Rico FMP (CFMC 2019a), the St. Thomas and St. John FMP (CFMC 2019b), and the St. Croix FMP (CFMC 2019c), in combination, would replace the existing U.S. Caribbean-wide FMPs. Each island-based FMP would establish management measures for the EEZ around the respective island and would retain most of the current management measures established under the U.S. Caribbean-wide FMPs that apply to the respective island management area (e.g., seasonal and area closures, minimum size limits, recreational bag limits). In addition, each island-based FMP would revise other management measures such as the species included for federal management, ACLs, and accountability measures.

On September 22, 2020, the National Marine Fisheries Service approved each of the island-based FMPs. Regulations to implement the island-based FMP are under development.