



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

**NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE**

Southeast Regional Office

263 13th Avenue South

St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

**JUN 22 2016**

F/SER28: MML

Mr. Miguel A. Rolón, Executive Director  
Caribbean Fishery Management Council  
270 Muñoz Rivera Ave., Suite 401  
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00918-1903

Dear Mr. Rolón:

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service requests the Caribbean Fishery Management Council review and make a recommendation regarding the enclosed Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) application at the June 2016 meeting. The EFP application was submitted by the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources. If granted, the EFP would authorize the use of contracted commercial fishermen aboard research vessels and private fishing vessels to collect reef fish species through two projects in waters of the Puerto Rico exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The EFP, if granted, would be valid from date of issuance through May 2018.

The first project would continue the collection of information on reef fish abundance and distribution in waters off eastern and western Puerto Rico as part of the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program Reef Fish Monitoring Project. Research in federal waters would consist of harvesting reef fish at approximately 20 stations in the EEZ off the west coast of Puerto Rico, and approximately at 10 stations in the EEZ off the east coast of Puerto Rico. Sampling would be conducted by 1) hook-and-line drift and anchor fishing, 2) bottom long line fishing, and 3) underwater cameras to identify and quantify reef fish species. Species expected to be caught and landed for the EFP include federally managed schoolmaster, lane, vermilion, yellowtail, mutton, silk, and blackfin snappers; and red hind, coney, graysby, yellowfin, yellowedge, red, tiger, and black groupers. All reef fish, including undersized and seasonally prohibited species, would be retained, except for goliath grouper, Nassau grouper, and all species of parrotfish. Stations and sampling dates would be randomly selected; therefore, sampling might occur during closed seasons in federal waters or in areas closed to certain fishing activities. Fish collected in this project would also provide some samples to be used in a second project included in the EFP application, as further described below.

The second project would employ histological methods to describe the annual reproductive cycle and minimum size at maturity of mutton snapper, red hind, coney, white grunt, tomtate, pluma porgy, king mackerel, and cero. Sampling would consist of approximately 10 trips in federal waters off the west coast of Puerto Rico. Twice per month, contracted fishers would use hook-and-line gear and spear guns to collect a minimum of 25 samples per trip from each species. Any other species incidentally caught by hook-and-line fishers would be released. Harvest of red hind grouper and mutton snapper may occur during their respective seasonal spawning closures.



I find this application warrants further consideration, and will be submitting a notice to the Office of the Federal Register for publication to solicit additional public comment. Enclosed, please find the proposal for this activity. Should you have additional questions or concerns about issuance of this EFP, please feel free to contact María del Mar López on my staff at 727-824-5305 or at [María.Lopez@noaa.gov](mailto:María.Lopez@noaa.gov).

Sincerely,



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

Enclosure