



**NOAA
FISHERIES**

Office of Law
Enforcement
Southeast
Division

OLE Update



Manny Antonaras
Deputy
Special Agent in Charge
Southeast Division
June 24, 2020

SOUTHEAST DIVISION

FIELD OFFICES

06/24/2020



SPECIAL AGENT OFFICE



ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OFFICE

DISTRICTS

D1: S. AT. INVESTIGATIONS

D2: S. AT. UNIFORM

D3: GOM INVESTIGATIONS

D4: GOM UNIFORM

AD Tracy A. Dunn

DSAC Manny Antonaras

Mobile

EO Glenn Kornegay

Slidell

SA Ron Messa

Houston /
League City

ASAC Charles Tyer

SA Frank Giarretto

EO Mathew Roache

Corpus Christi

SA Matt Roberson

SA John O'Malley

Houma

EO Ian Isaacs

Niceville

SA Alan Coker

SA Elisabeth Nelson

Panama City

SEO Joe Scarpa

EO Bibler

SA Paige Casey

SA Kelly Kalamas

St. Petersburg

Sunrise

SA James Rodriguez

SA Omar Purcell

SA Heather Nicotri

Cape Canaveral

EO Pending)

New Bern

SA Wil Widener

EO Miles Dover

Charleston

SEO P. O'Shaughnessy

EO Lind

SA Vacant

Savannah

IUU EO Ben Hughes

Jacksonville

ASAC Casey Oravetz

SA Tim Donaldson

SA Ben Boots

S. AT

GOM

Puerto Rico/USVI (D1/D3)

San Juan: SA Miguel Borges

St. Thomas: (EO
Pending)

Key West

SA Ken Blackburn

Miami

IUU EO Pending)

OLE Puerto Rico / USVI Updates



In January 2020, USCG referred a case to OLE, documenting a USCG boarding approximately 15 NM west of Puerto Rico. Boarding officers documented the subject was in possession of 23 queen snappers, 5 silk snappers and 3 cardinal snappers for a total of 31 snappers. The subject, violated the snapper bag limit, (50 CFR §622.437 (b) *Bag limits*) of 5 snappers per person per day. The subject was 26 snappers over the bag limit and possessed 5 silk snapper OLE issued an enforcement action for violating the snapper bag limit. Additionally, the subject violated the silk snapper closure 50 CFR § 622.435 (a)(1)(iii) by having 5 silk snappers onboard.

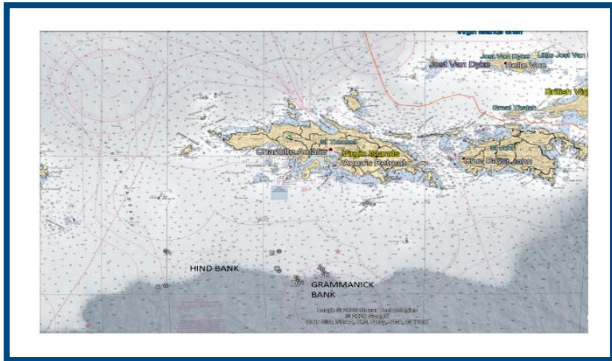


In February 2020, DNER boarded a fishing vessel that was actively fishing inside the closed area known as Abrir la Sierra, west of Puerto Rico 50 CFR § 622.435 (a)(2)(B)(3). The subject was observed by DNER Officers catching a wahoo inside the closed area. OLE issued the subject a Written Warning for this violation.



In March 2020, OLE was referred a case by the USCG were they boarded a vessel from St. Croix with 3 yellowfin tuna onboard. The subject had an expired HMS permit, he renewed the permit the same day. A written warning was sent for this violation.

OLE Patrols: Puerto Rico and USVI



February 2020: OLE participated in a joint operation with USCG in the USVI. Patrols were conducted from a USCG Cutter and small boat in the waters around St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix. Patrol activity was focused in the areas of the Hind Bank and Grammanik Bank, which were closed to all fishing.



OLE conducted a joint air patrol on the CBP AMO patrol aircraft. The patrol was along the north, west and south coast of Puerto Rico. Several fishing vessels and one pelagic long liner were detected.

OLE Updates – Puerto Rico and USVI

IUU and SIMP – Port of San Juan

- Port of San Juan Seafood entry was missing SIMP documents. Broker was contacted and provided the paperwork.
- SIMP covered species were being imported to the San Juan Port without the required documentation. The broker was contacted and provided the paperwork.
- SIMP documents were missing regarding an importation of Cod into the San Juan Port. Documents were provided by the broker once solicited by OLE.

Training / Outreach / Meetings

- December 2019 , OLE provided HMS training to DNER Officers from the Aguadilla field office. The training was provided with DNER biologists.
- January 2020 – OLE participated in the Caribbean Border Inter-agency Group (CBIG) meeting.
- February 2020, OLE participated in an HMS training event provided to JEA partner DNER Officers from the San Juan Office. The training was provided by DNER Biologists, and OLE.
- March 2020, OLE SA met with JEA coordinator Ramon Freddy Perez. Mr. Perez is a DNER Officer POC for the JEA



OLE Investigative Updates

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, June 9, 2020

Co-Owner of Puerto Rican Online Aquarium Business Pleads Guilty to Illicit Trafficking of Protected Reef Creatures

A former resident of Hormigueros, Puerto Rico, pleaded guilty today to export smuggling and two felony violations of the Lacey Act for collecting, falsely labeling, and shipping protected marine invertebrate species as part of an effort to subvert Puerto Rican law designed to protect corals and other reef species, the Department of Justice announced.

Raymond Michael Torres Ramos, 45, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Raúl M. Arias-Marxuach in the District of Puerto Rico, and will be sentenced on Nov. 13, 2020.

"The illegal harvest and trafficking of reef species is a significant problem that contributes to habitat destruction, coastal erosion, and the decline of coral ecosystems worldwide," said Assistant Attorney General Jeffrey Bossert Clark of the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division. "The Department of Justice and its partners will continue to investigate and prosecute those who violate our environmental laws for illicit commercial gain."

"Prosecutions like this one are important because, by holding companies and businessmen accountable for the harm they cause to the ocean's ecosystem, we do our part to protect our natural resources," said U.S. Attorney W. Stephen Muldrow of the District of Puerto Rico. "Puerto Rico is surrounded by the beauty of the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, and those who intentionally damage our reefs must be held accountable for their criminal conduct."

"Protection of our nation's marine life resources is of utmost importance in this world. Marine life species such as Florida Ricordea and live rock that they are attached to are part of a complex marine reef ecosystem that is unique and fragile," said David Pharo, Resident Agent in Charge of for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Office of Law Enforcement. "Cooperative investigations such as this too often expose these resources are illegally harvested and trafficked domestically and internationally. Just as these species were hammered and chiseled from their natural reef environment, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and partner agencies will continue to hammer and chisel away at those who traffic and profit from such unlawful activities."

"This case highlights the great investigative collaboration in dismantling a concerted effort to profit from the destruction of the delicate marine ecosystem in Puerto Rico," said Tracy A. Dunn, Assistant Director in charge of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Law Enforcement, Southeast Division. "NOAA's main mission is the protection of living marine resources and habitat for future generations. The agency's enforcement personnel take this responsibility seriously and work diligently to detect and collect evidence against those who would seek to profit from the over-harvest and trade in illegally taken marine species. I applaud the coordinated efforts of NOAA, USFWS, and DOJ to successfully bring Mr. Torres to justice."

Torres was the co-owner of the San Sebastian, Puerto Rico-based saltwater aquarium business, Caribbean Reefers (spelling error intentional) that also operated online through the eBay store "Redragon1975". A large part of the business was devoted to the sale of native Puerto Rican marine species that are popular in the saltwater aquarium trade.

Torres sent illegally collected live specimens to customers in the mainland United States and foreign countries by commercial courier services. One of the most popular items that Torres and his business sent off-island was an organism from the genus Ricordea. These animals are known as "rics," "polyps," or "mushrooms" in the aquarium industry. Members of the genus form part of the reef structure and spend their adult lives fastened in place to the reef. These animals are colorful in natural light, but what makes them particularly interesting to aquarium owners is that they "glow" under the UV lights that are typically used in high-end saltwater aquariums.

It is illegal to harvest Ricordea, zoanthids, and anemones in Puerto Rico if the specimens are going to be sent off-island or otherwise sold commercially, nor is there a permit available to do so. Torres personally collected some of the Ricordea and other reef creatures that he sold off-island. On multiple occasions, he would accompany another person and they would snorkel from the shoreline in search of Ricordea. Because Ricordea are attached to the reef substrate, Torres would utilize a chisel to break off the animals, and in doing so, take chunks of the reef with him.



NOAA FISHERIES

Report A Violation

Please contact us if you see a possible violation of a federal marine resource law.

- **(800) 853-1964**





Questions?