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Proposed Exempted Fishing Permit for NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Panama City Lab

169th Caribbean Fishery Management Council Meeting
June 23-24, 2020



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Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP)

An EFP is required for any fishing that would otherwise be in violation of the Magnuson-Stevens Act or other fisheries laws or their implementing regulations, and is not considered part of an exempted educational activity.



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EFP Request

NMFS Panama City Lab is requesting an EFP to continue their project to collect information on the population size and abundance, life history characteristics, and habitats of deep-water snappers off the west coast of Puerto Rico (previous EFP issued 11.16.2018).

The applicants would continue using commercial fishermen and vessels to deploy video cameras on deep-water fishing gear and to collect samples of black, blackfin, silk and queen snappers.



Regulation Exemptions

The proposed collection involves activities that would otherwise be prohibited by regulations, as they pertain to reef fish managed by the Council in the Puerto Rico EEZ.

EFP exemptions for project participants:

50 CFR § 622.435 (Seasonal and Area Closures):

- February 1 – April 30 seasonal closure for red, black, tiger, yellowfin, or yellowedge groupers;
- December 1 – last day of February seasonal closure for red hind grouper (western PR);
- October 1 – December 31 seasonal closure for vermilion, black, silk, or blackfin snappers;
- October 1 - March 31 seasonal closure in Bajo de Sico

50 CFR § 622.437 (Bag Limits):

- Bag limit for groupers, snappers, and parrotfishes combined - 5 per person/day or, if 3 or more persons are aboard, 15 per vessel/day.



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Project Objectives

- Describe essential fish habitat of deep water snapper species off of Puerto Rico using new stereo video imagery.
- Determine reproductive cycle, growth, and age/size at sexual maturation of queen, silk, black and blackfin snappers.

Project Location

- Sampling would occur along the western coast of Puerto Rico
- Anticipated 39 trips during the 1-year project period
 - 15 trips located in federal waters
 - 1 – 12 miles from the coast
 - Target depth range is 328 – 2,133 feet (100 - 650 meters)



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Research Methods

- Fishing would occur while adrift
- Two vertical fishing lines deployed per site
 - One with attached video system (description below)
 - soak time 30 minutes
 - One with 12 hooks to catch deep-water snappers
 - soak time 20 minutes
 - Manual snapper reels will be used to retrieve lines

Stereo-Baited Underwater Video System including two Sony cameras encased in a light weight, pressure tested housing mounted on an aluminum bar with the horizontal plane and two LED video lights mounted to the bar. Video system is encased in a lightweight triangular enclosure with a baited arm. Once deployed, the system would rest on the seafloor via tripod legs.



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EFP Anticipated Harvest

A maximum of 450 targeted species would be retained under the EFP as follows:

- up to 150 queen snapper
- up to 120 silk snapper
- up to 120 blackfin snapper
- up to 60 black snapper

A maximum of 400 incidental species could* be retained under the EFP as follows:

- up to 100 vermilion and wenchman snapper combined
- up to 100 red hind grouper
- up to 100 yellowfin, red, tiger, and black grouper combined
- up to 100 yellowedge grouper

* During closure periods, incidental species would only onboard for sufficient time to record length measurements.

All fish caught outside closure periods may be retained, consistent with applicable laws.



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Timeline

- Proposal received April 2020
- Notice published in the *Federal Register* June 16, 2020
Comment period open through July 16, 2020
[Review and comment](#)
- After comment period closes, NMFS will consider whether to issue the EFP
- Current EFP will expire on August 1, 2020
- New EFP would be valid from date of issuance through August 1, 2021

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/caribbean-exempted-fishing-permits-efps>



Questions?

