



NOAA
FISHERIES

Development of a Federal Permit Program in the U.S. Caribbean



179th Caribbean Fishery Management Council Meeting

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Isla Verde, Puerto Rico

Federal Permit Program

- An absence of a federal permit system, or mandatory federal reporting requirements, has been identified as a major contributor to the lack of fishing effort information in the EEZ.
- A permitting system would allow better estimates for measuring fishing effort for Council-managed fisheries while shedding light on the effectiveness of regulations implemented to manage that effort.
- The permit may be a general requirement or may be specific to a particular fishery sector such as spiny lobster trap/pot sectors or deep-water snapper.



Federal Permit Program and Needs/Issues it could Address

A primary goal of establishing federal permits or a federal permit system is to gain a better understanding of the population of fishers and their harvest patterns in the EEZ.

- Increase knowledge of fishing effort
- Better identify spatial patterns of capture and harvest
- Reduce scientific and management uncertainty
- Enhance ability to obtain landings data from fishermen
 - Provide accurate and timely data on landings, which would enable the application of in-season accountability measures
- Manage competing interests for the resource
- Identify trends in the health of targeted fish stocks
- Quantify the socioeconomic importance of permitted fishing sectors and mitigate negative impacts of management to fishing communities.
- Provide permitted fishers with a better understanding of their fishery and the opportunities and implications of management to that fishery
- Target active fishermen for educational and/or research activities



Background – *Federal Permit Discussions*

- Permits Discussed from 2013-2016. Action was tabled in 2016.
- Scoping Hearings in March 2015 (all Islands) and 2016 (Puerto Rico)
- Documents Developed:
 - 2014 - White paper – general aspects of fishing permits and two permit opportunities: Commercial trap fishery St. Thomas and St. John and Commercial Snapper Unit 2 fishery Puerto Rico.
 - 2015 - Scoping Document Caribbean Permits (*see Support Doc. 1 179th Mtg. Briefing Book (BB)*)
 - 2016 – White Paper for Lobster USVI; Scoping Paper for Deep-Water Snappers EEZ Puerto Rico (*see Support Doc. 2 179th Mtg. BB*)



Current U.S. Caribbean Permits

- Federal Waters:
 - No federal permits are required to fish, sell, or purchase Council-managed species in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ.
 - Only HMS permits are required to fish in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ.
- Puerto Rico
 - Commercial fishing license required
 - Additional species-specific permits for incidental catch, land crab, sirajo gobies, and deep-water snapper. Permits for lobster, etc.
- USVI
 - Commercial fishing permit required (moratorium lifted in 2021).
 - Helper permits required

Control Dates for Federal Spiny Lobster and Reef Fish Fisheries (Next slide)



Control Dates

- Persons entering the fishery after the control date are not assured future access.
- Control dates do not commit the Council or NMFS to take any particular action to limit entry into particular fisheries.
- February 11, 2011 control date, applies to:
 - Commercial trap sector of the reef fish fishery in federal waters in the US Caribbean, 78 FR 20496 (April 5, 2013)
 - Commercial trap sector of the spiny lobster fishery in federal waters off Puerto Rico, 78 FR 20496 (April 5, 2013)
- September 1, 2017 control date, applies to:
 - Spiny lobster trap fishery in federal waters off St. Thomas and St. John, and St. Croix, 84 FR 55900 (Oct. 18, 2019) (supersedes date in April 2013 FR notice above for USVI)



Federal Permit Program

How to do this?

1) What is the purpose/need? What is the problem the Council wants to address?

- Basic data collection on effort and participation?
- Collection of spatial data and landings data?
- Control the fishery? Control effort? Control the gear?
 - Reduce capacity in the fishery?
- Managing competing interests for the resource

2) Define the scope of the action: General vs Species-Specific or Sector Specific

- All EEZ?
- An individual island management area?
- A particular species/species group?
- All or one sector?

3) Other

- What is the metric? For example, keep landings at or under the ACL?
- Adding logbook requirement – monitor landings
- Allows to control effort – if restrictions are included such as gear restrictions (type and number allowed), trip limits, number of participants.



Options Presented to the Council (2014-2016)

1. Require commercial vessel operators to obtain a federal permit to fish in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ;
2. Require commercial vessel operators to obtain a fishing license from either Puerto Rico or the USVI to fish in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ;
3. Require commercial vessel operators to obtain federal permit OR a fishing license from either Puerto Rico or the USVI to fish in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ;
4. Require a species/species group/fishery specific permit in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ;
5. Require a gear-specific permit in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ;
6. Require a dealer permit to purchase fish harvested from the U.S. Caribbean EEZ;
7. Conduct a pilot study with some or all fishers from some or all island groups to evaluate the practicality of permits in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ;
8. Others?



What has changed?

Federal Level

- IBFMPs implementation delayed – Expected Date of Implementation Summer/Early Fall 2022
 - Varying management measures under each FMP
 - Updated ACLs and AMs
 - Federal Permit Program included as a measure under the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Program (SBRM) in IBFMPs
 - ACL exceedances triggering AM application (e.g. Spiny lobster PR 2022)

Local Level (for reference/compatibility purposes)

- Electronic reporting (ER) in Puerto Rico (commercial). Development of ER in USVI
- Potential changes to the Puerto Rico Local Deep-water snapper permit?
- Changes to the commercial license moratorium in the USVI
- Implementation of trap reduction program in USVI



Next Steps:

- Council to decide if moving forward with developing a Federal permit system in the EEZ*
 - Provide guidance on what to explore (e.g., general permit, limited access for a fishery, other)**
 - Pilot studies?
- Create Interdisciplinary Plan Team and/or other advisory groups if needed
- Discuss preliminary timeline**



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