NOAA FISHERIES

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

Draft Amendment 1
Version 1

173rd Caribbean Fishery Management Council
Regular Meeting

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Caribbean Fishery Management Council
CFMC

Overview

- **Issue:** Type of buoy gear traditionally used to fish commercially for deep-water fish (snappers, groupers) in Puerto Rico (*cala con boya*) and the USVI (deep-drop buoy gear) does not conform to federal regulations.
- **Buoy gear** as defined in 50 CFR 622.2 cannot contain more than 10 hooks connected between the buoy and the terminal end.
- State regulations for Puerto Rico and the USVI do not specify the number of hooks that can be used for buoy gear.
- Caribbean fishers have indicated that they would like to increase the number of hooks that are allowed under the legal definition of buoy gear for federal waters.

Overview

- The use of any gear not listed as authorized for the fishery is prohibited (50 CFR 600.725(v)).
- Authorized gear types for commercial harvest of reef fish in IBFMPs: automatic reel, bandit gear, buoy gear, hand line, longline, rod and reel, trap, pot, spear..
- A gear type configuration with more than 10 hooks between the buoy and the terminal end does not meet the legal definition of “buoy gear” in 50 CFR 622.2 and is not considered authorized “buoy gear.”
- Such gear does not meet the definition of any other hook and line gear authorized. Therefore, this gear cannot be used by those fishing commercially for reef fish managed under the island-based FMPs unless that gear type is added as an allowable gear type under the island-based FMPs or the definition of buoy gear is amended to include this gear type*.

Overview

In this amendment, the Council would modify the definition of “buoy gear” included in 50 CFR 622.2 as it applies to persons fishing commercially for managed reef fish to address the use of additional hooks preferred by some participants of each of the Puerto Rico and USVI commercial reef fish fisheries harvesting deep-water fish.

Description of the Puerto Rico Fishery Deep-Water Reef Fish Component

Local name: Cala con boya

Species targeted with local buoy gear :

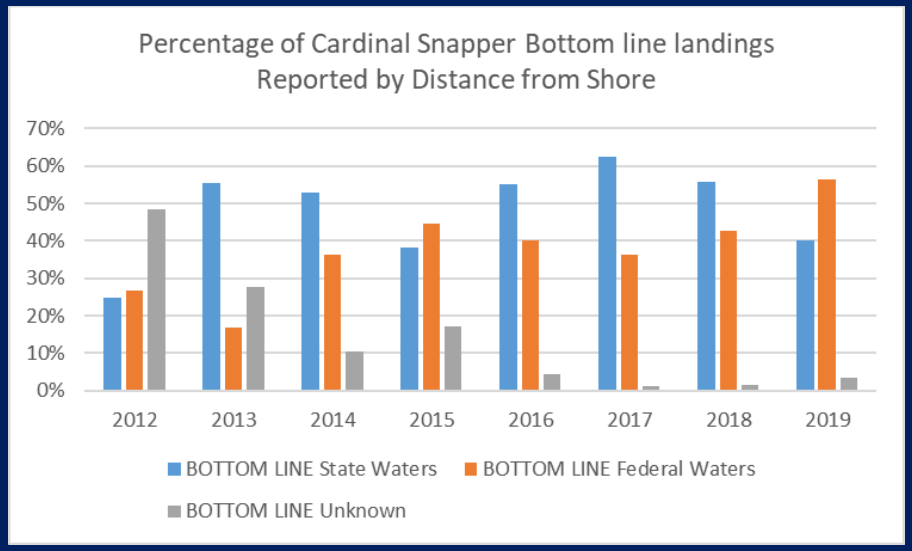
Shallower waters (40~100 fathoms): silk, blackfin, black, vermillion, wenchman (S1)

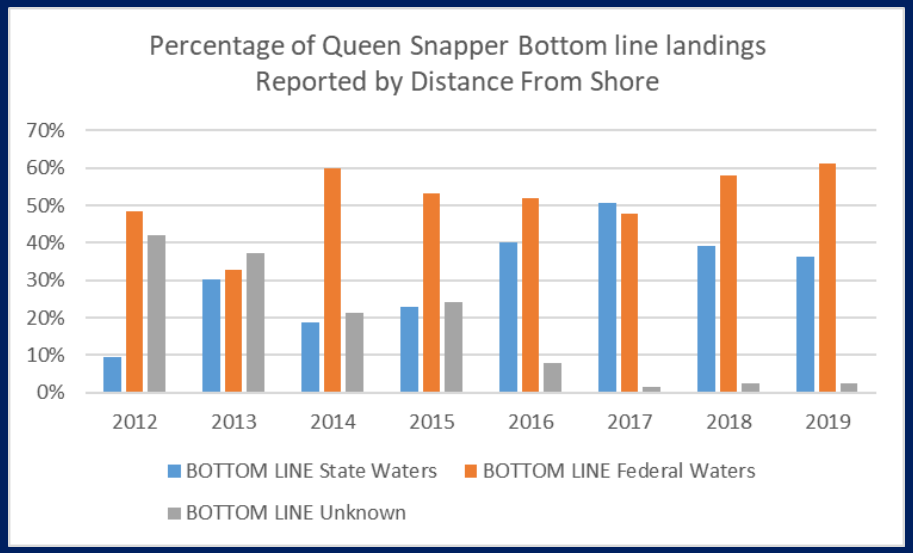
Deeper waters (170-230 fathoms): queen and cardinal (S2), also misty (guasa) and yellowedge grouper (guajil del hondo), big silk snappers.

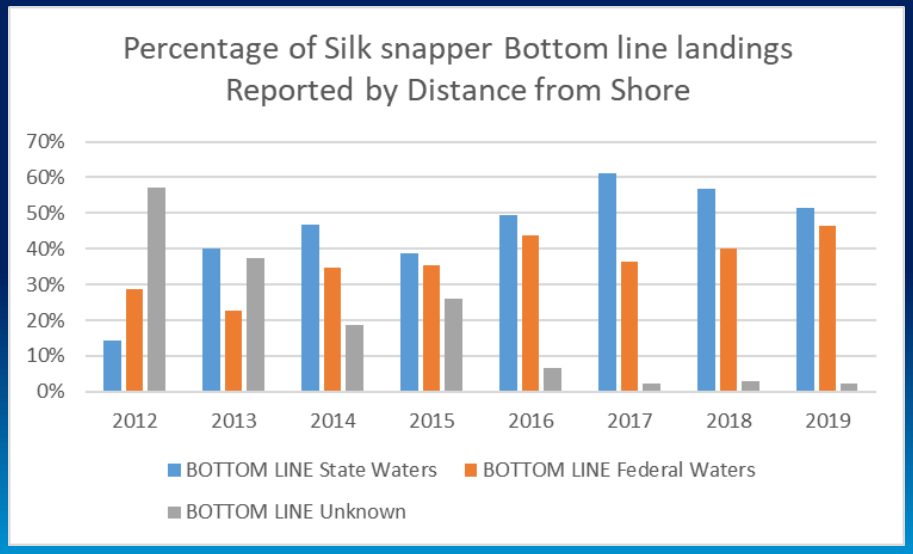
Bycatch species: glasseye snapper (comico), Atlantic scombrops (cartucho prieto), dogfish

- Number of hooks (circle) used are related to fishing effort, depth fished, previous experiences with lost gear
- SU1 species (shallower) - typically fished with less hooks (5-10 hooks)
- SU2 species (deeper) – fished with more hooks, max of 30. Most harvest (if not all) of these species occurs with local buoy gear (*cala con boya*). Very specialized fishery
- Average number of set lines used: 3
- Bait used: little tunny, sardines, bonito, bacora
- West coast (1) and East coast (2) important landing areas for these species
- Puerto Rico has a special permit for cardinal and queen snappers ~ 60 participants
- It is estimated that approximately 200 fishermen use *cala con boya* in Puerto Rico
- Market: restaurants, villas pesqueras
- Price/pound: $7.50-8.50

Description of the Puerto Rico Fishery Deep-Water Reef Fish Component Reef Fish







Description of the USVI Fisheries Deep-Water Reef Fish Component

Local name: Deep-drop buy gear

Species targeted with local buoy gear :

queen snapper, blackfin snapper, black snapper, vermillion, goldeye (glasseye?) snapper, misty grouper

Fishing with deep-drop buoy gear from 300 to 1,200 ft (50 – 200 fathoms)

Fishing with this gear type more common in St. Croix (~9 fishers) than in St. Thomas and St. John

- Number of hooks used varies, average of 22. Can be up to 50*, spaced 6 inches apart.
- Some fishermen may use up to six buoy/lines, some just one line
- Number of hooks related to fishing effort, depth fished, species targeted, areas fished, previous experiences with lost gear, cost of gear, etc.
- Bait used: little tunny, squid, small skipjack
- Sold in the local marketplace usually on Saturdays
- Price/pound: $8.00

Description of the USVI Fisheries Deep-Water Reef Fish Component

Gear types listed to harvest deep-water reef fish (misty grouper, black, blackfin, cardinal, queen, silk, vermillion snappers):

- Hand line
- Hook and line with power winch
- Hook and line – unknown type
- Rod and reel
- Fish trap
- Buoy (yo-yo)

Draft Purpose and Need

Purpose: to modify the definition of buoy gear included in federal regulations at 50 CFR 622.2 to allow the commercial sector of the longline/hook and line component of the fishery for managed reef fish described in each of the island-based FMPs to use a larger number of hooks when using buoy gear.

Need: To ensure that commercial fishermen fishing in federal waters off Puerto Rico and the USVI for managed reef fish can use the gear type preferred by some fishers, with additional hooks.

Action: Buoy Gear Definition for the Commercial Harvest of Managed Reef Fish

Alternative 1. No Action. The current definition of buoy gear specified in 50 CFR 622.2 would be retained.

Alternative 2. Modify the definition of buoy gear in 50 CFR 622.2 as it applies to the commercial sector of the longline/hook and line component of the fishery for managed reef fish to allow the use of up to 25 hooks connected between the buoy and the terminal end.

Alternative 1. No Action. The current definition of buoy gear specified in 50 CFR 622.2 would be retained.

- The definition of buoy gear in federal regulations at 50 CFR 622.2 would remain unchanged.
  - One of the specific requirements under this definition is that buoy gear cannot contain more than 10 hooks connected between the buoy and the terminal end.
  - In components of each of the IBFMP fisheries where buoy gear is an authorized gear (i.e., commercial sector harvesting managed reef fish) — fishers must limit the gear to 10 hooks.

Alternative 2. Modify the definition of buoy gear in 50 CFR 622.2 as it applies to the commercial sector of the longline/hook and line component of the fishery for managed reef fish to allow the use of up to 25 hooks connected between the buoy and the terminal end.

- Would increase the number of hooks allowed to be used up to 25 instead of 10.
- This new maximum number of hooks would allow those fishing commercially in federal waters for managed reef fish to legally use the gear configuration employed by some in state waters and federal waters off Puerto Rico and the USVI.
- The modification would only apply to those using this gear to fish commercially for managed reef fish species.

Preliminary Effects Analysis in Draft Amendment

- Qualitative
- Assumes changes in total landings of target species due to changes in total number of hooks used per trip.
- Would increasing the number of allowable hooks per set affect total fishing pressure and potential for additional catch and landings, or additional bycatch?

Next Steps

- Input from District Advisory Panels (DAP) needed to complete description of the fishery
  - Council tasks DAPs to gather information from fishers and to report their findings to staff?
- Interdisciplinary Plan Team (IPT) to analyze data, available information, and finalize effects
- IPT drafts second version of amendment and presents to the Council at the August meeting for potential final action.

Queen Snapper (Cartucho) resting on the seafloor at 439 m on Dog Seamount in the Caribbean.
Image: Ocean Exploration Trust and U.S. Geological Survey.
https://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/okeanos/explorations/ex1502/background/snapper-grouper/welcome.html

Additional Slides

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.

50 CFR 600.725(v) gear table and 50 CFR 622.2 definitions

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*

Reef Fish- Puerto Rico

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*

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