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Amendment 2 to the Puerto Rico, St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John Fishery Management Plans: Trawl, Net Gear and Descending Devices

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Outcomes from August 2023 Council Meeting

- Council made changes to Sub-alternative 2(b) of Actions 1(b), 2(b), and 3(b) (Gillnet action) for all three islands

| Action 1: Puerto Rico - Trawl, Gillnets, Trammel Nets, Purse Seines | Action 2: St. Croix - Trawl, Gillnets, Trammel Nets, Purse Seines | Action 3: St. Thomas/St. John - Trawl, Gillnets, Trammel Nets, Purse Seines | Action 4: PR, STX, STT/STJ - Descending Devices |
|---|---|---|---|
| Action 1(a): Trawl | 2(a): Trawl | 3(a): Trawl | Descending Devices All islands |
| Action 1(b): Gillnets | 2(b): Gillnets | 3(b): Gillnets | |
| Action 1(c): Trammel | 2(c): Trammel | 3(c): Trammel | |
| Action 1(d): Purse seines | 2(d): Purse seines | 3(d): Purse seines | |

Amendment 2 to the Island-based FMPs: Trawl and Net Gear, and Descending Devices

Statement of Purpose and Need

- The purpose of this amendment is to prevent potential damage to habitats, including essential fish habitat, from certain gear types, protect species associated with such habitats, as well as to promote best fishing practices, and enhance the survival of released fish in the EEZ around Puerto Rico, St. Croix, and St. Thomas and St. John.
- The need for this amendment is to minimize potentially adverse effects of fishing to habitats and associated species, and to minimize the mortality of bycatch species.



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Actions 1(a), 2(a), and 3(a). Modify the Use of Trawl Gear in Federal Waters around Puerto Rico, St. Croix, and St. Thomas/St. John, respectively

Alternative 3 (*Preferred for all three islands*). Prohibit the use of trawl gear for all fishing in the EEZ around Puerto Rico, St. Croix, or St. Thomas/St. John, respectively.

Actions 1(b), 2(b), and 3(b). Modify the use of Gillnets in federal waters around Puerto Rico, St. Croix, and St. Thomas/St. John, respectively

Alternative 2. Prohibit the use of gillnets in the EEZ around Puerto Rico, St. Croix, or St. Thomas/St. John:

Sub-alternative 2b (*Preferred for all three islands*). For fishing for all federally-managed species, and limit the use of gillnets in the EEZ around (Puerto Rico, St. Croix, St. Thomas/St. John) to fish for non-federally managed fish species with surface gillnets that meet the following specifications and requirements: (1) mesh size of the surface gillnet must be 0.75 inches square or 1.5-inch stretched; (2) one surface gillnet up to 600 feet in length is permitted per vessel; (3) the surface gillnet must be used 20 feet or more above the bottom; and (4) the surface gillnet must be tended at all times.



Summary of Actions with their Preferred Alternatives (as included in V3.3 Draft Amendment 2, Nov 2023)

Actions 1(c), 2(c), and 3(c). Modify the use of Trammel Nets in Federal waters around Puerto Rico, St. Croix, and St. Thomas/St. John, respectively

Alternative 2 (*Preferred for all three islands*). Prohibit the use of trammel nets for all fishing in the EEZ around Puerto Rico, St. Croix, or St. Thomas/St. John, respectively.

Actions 1(d), 2(d), and 3(d). Modify the use of Purse seines in Federal waters around Puerto Rico, St. Croix, and St. Thomas/St. John, respectively

Alternative 2 (*Preferred for all three islands*). Prohibit the use of purse seines for all fishing in the EEZ around Puerto Rico, St. Croix, or St. Thomas/St. John, respectively.



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Action 4. Requirements for the Use of Descending Devices in the Reef Fish Component of the Puerto Rico, St. Croix, and St. Thomas/St. John FMPs

Alternative 2 (*Preferred*). Require a descending device* be on board a commercial or recreational vessel and readily available for use while fishing for or possessing species in the reef fish component of the Puerto Rico, St. Croix, and St. Thomas/St. John FMPs.

* For the purpose of this requirement, a “descending device” means an instrument to which is attached a minimum of 16 ounces of weight and a length of line that will release the fish at the depth from which the fish was caught or a minimum of 60-ft (18-m). The descending device attaches to the fish’s mouth or is a container that will hold the fish. The device **MUST** be capable of releasing the fish automatically, by the actions of the operator of the device, or by allowing the fish to escape on its own. Since minimizing surface time is critical to increasing survival, descending devices shall be readily available for use while engaged in fishing.



Action Items and Next Steps

December
2023

- Council reviews final draft Amendment 2, Version 3.3 (Nov 2023) and the draft codified text
- Council approves Amendment 2 for submission to the Secretary of Commerce (allowing staff to make editorial edits)

2024

- NMFS prepares Notice of Availability for Amendment 2, proposed rule, publishes
- NMFS prepares final rule, publishes
- Amendment 2 becomes effective



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