

## **2010 CARIBBEAN ANNUAL CATCH LIMIT AMENDMENT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**December 2011**

### **What fisheries will be affected by the 2010 Caribbean Annual Catch Limit (ACL) Amendment?**

- Amendments will be made to both the Fishery Management Plan for the Queen Conch Fishery of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and to the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Fishery of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

### **What actions does the 2010 Caribbean ACL Amendment contain?**

- Specifies annual catch limits (amount of fish that can be taken without triggering accountability measures) to end overfishing (rate of removal too high) of managed species and species groups.
- Defines accountability measures (measures to prevent or address an overage of an annual catch limit)
  - Reduction in the length of the fishing year in the year following a determination of exceeding the annual catch limits (ACLs).
- Defines triggers for implementing accountability measures (AMs).
- Establishes framework provisions that allow the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (Caribbean Council) to rapidly respond to changing conditions in the fishery or the environment that supports that fishery.
- Changes grouping of several fish species based on habitat type.
- Subdivides federal waters of the U.S. Caribbean for purposes of tracking catch and applying AMs.
- Treats separately the recreational and commercial fishing sectors in Puerto Rico, where sector-specific landings data are available, but not in the U.S. Virgin Islands where recreational harvest data are not collected.
- Prohibits fishing for, or possession of, midnight, blue and rainbow parrotfish in federal waters.
- Further reduce St. Croix parrotfish harvest to address uncertain effects of that harvest on essential settlement substrate for Acroporid corals.
- Establishes daily bag limits:
  - Allowing for an aggregate harvest of not more than five fish per fisher per day including not more than two parrotfish per fisher per day or six parrotfish per boat per day; and
  - 15 aggregate snapper, grouper, and parrotfish per boat per day (will not apply to a fisherman who has a valid commercial fishing license).

### **To what waters will the 2010 Caribbean ACL Amendment apply?**

- To all federal waters in the U.S. Caribbean.
- For Puerto Rico, federal waters extend from nine nautical miles off the coast of the island to 200 nautical miles off the coast of the island.
- For the U.S. Virgin Islands, federal waters extend from three nautical miles off the coast of the islands to 200 nautical miles off the coast of the islands.
  - In some areas between St. John and the British Virgin Islands the applicable area is smaller due to a division of oceanic waters between national jurisdictions.

## **ANNUAL CATCH LIMITS (ACLs)**

### **What is an ACL?**

- An ACL is the level of annual catch of a population, or population complex, that if met or exceeded triggers AMs, such as a seasonal closure or quota closure.
- In the U.S. Caribbean, ACLs are separately set for each of three islands groups:
  - Puerto Rico
  - St. Thomas and St. John
  - St. Croix.
- ACLs can apply to a single species of fish (e.g., Nassau grouper, goliath grouper, queen conch) or to a group of species (e.g., parrotfish, some snapper, some grouper).
- Separate ACLs may be established for each sector of a fishery, (i.e. commercial and recreational), but the combined catch of all sectors may not exceed the total ACL for a species or species complex.

### **What Caribbean species are undergoing overfishing and therefore require ACLs and AMs in 2010?**

- Snapper Unit 1 (silk, black, vermilion, blackfin, and wenchman)
- Grouper Unit 1 (Nassau)
- Grouper Unit 4 (red, tiger, yellowfin, black)
- Parrotfish (blue, midnight, princess, queen, rainbow, redfin, redtail, stoplight, redband, striped)
- Queen conch

### **How were the ACLs determined for snapper and grouper species in the Caribbean?**

- The ACLs for snapper and grouper species are based upon the average catch recorded from each of the island groups, for each of the species groups being considered in this amendment, and for each of the recreational (for Puerto Rico only) and commercial sectors (Table 1).
  - The date range was chosen since landings during those years were considered consistently reliable across all islands.
- Average catches from 1999-2005 were adjusted downward by 15 percent (Table 1) to account for uncertainty in the scientific and management process.
  - Uncertainty stems from the vagaries of data reporting and time lags in application of corrections in response to changing patterns of catch.

### **How were ACLs established for queen conch and parrotfish in the Caribbean?**

- For queen conch and for all parrotfish, the Caribbean Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee established an acceptable biological catch level, and the ACL cannot exceed that level for each species.
  - For queen conch, that level is 50,000 pounds for St. Croix and 0 pounds for Puerto Rico and St. Thomas/St. John (Table 1).
  - For parrotfish, that level is 255,000 pounds for St. Croix, 68,000 pounds for Puerto Rico, and 42,500 pounds for St. Thomas/St. John (Table 1).
- An additional reduction to the parrotfish ACL in St. Croix was implemented to further reduce the impacts of parrotfish harvest on Acropora species.
  - The reduction resulted in a final ACL of 240,000 pounds for parrotfish in St. Croix waters.

**Table 1. ACLs for the Caribbean**

Island Group	Species Group <sup>1</sup>	Sector	Average landings <sup>*4</sup>	Average landings* during 2006-2007 <sup>2</sup>	2010 Annual catch limits <sup>*3</sup>
Puerto Rico	Queen Conch	Commercial	403,349	250,122	0
	Parrotfish		127,980	54,332	52,737
	Snapper Unit 1		334,923	151,300	284,685
	Snapper Unit 2		171,666	151,007	145,916
	Snapper Unit 3		406,794	183,987	345,775
	Snapper Unit 4		439,171	239,445	373,295
	Snapper Total		1,352,554	725,739	1,149,671
	Grouper		208,839	73,625	177,513
	Queen Conch	Recreational	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Parrotfish		37,042	6,730	15,263
	Snapper Unit 1		112,384	205,109	95,526
	Snapper Unit 2		40,953	8,528	34,810
	Snapper Unit 3		97,833	69,097	83,158
	Snapper Unit 4		33,540	16,607	28,509
St. Thomas/ St. John	Snapper Total		284,710	299,341	242,004
	Grouper		90,839	55,206	77,213
	Queen Conch	Commercial	1,649	2,557	0
	Parrotfish		48,818	42,528	42,500
	Snapper		157,382	166,231	133,775
St. Croix	Grouper		60,999	56,812	51,849
	Queen Conch	Commercial	107,720	149,026	50,000
	Parrotfish		293,219	361,229	240,000
	Snapper		121,113	130,581	102,946
	Grouper		35,806	28,475	30,435

\* Pounds of whole fish

<sup>1</sup> Snapper Unit 1 includes silk, black, blackfin, vermilion, and wenchman; Snapper Unit 2 includes queen and cardinal; Snapper Unit 3 includes gray, lane, mutton, dog, schoolmaster, and mahogany; Snapper Unit 4 includes yellowtail.

<sup>2</sup> 2006-2007 represent the most recent years, following implementation of the Comprehensive Sustainable Fisheries Act.

Amendment, for which landings data were available at the time of preparation of the amendments. This average is for combined federal and territorial/commonwealth waters, and is for comparison purposes.

<sup>3</sup> When combined federal and territorial/commonwealth landings reach the annual catch limit, accountability measures will be applied in federal waters only.

<sup>4</sup> Data range is 1999-2005 for St. Croix and Puerto Rico commercial landings, 2000-2005 for St. Thomas commercial landings, and 2000-2005 for Puerto Rico recreational landings.

### **Why are there additional species of snapper and grouper included in the 2010 ACL Amendment?**

- Because landings are not reported to the level of individual species throughout the USVI and Puerto Rico (with the exception of snapper in Puerto Rico), average landings cannot be determined for each individual species. It is therefore necessary to propose setting ACLs for species groups rather than for individual species.
- ACLs must be set for all species, including those not designated as undergoing overfishing, by 2011. For those species that are to be carried along in this amendment, but are not designated as undergoing overfishing, the process is accelerated but by less than a year.

### **How can ACLs be changed?**

- Through a “framework action” which is based on a series of management options established within a fishery management plan, or through an amendment to that plan.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES (AMs)**

#### **What are the triggers for implementing AMs in the Caribbean?**

- AMs are triggered if actual average landings exceed the established ACL.
- The landings used include both those reported from territorial/commonwealth waters and those reported from federal waters.
  - For example, the queen conch ACL of 50,000 pounds in St. Croix waters is met when the combined harvest of queen conch from federal and St. Croix territorial waters reaches 50,000 pounds.
- Though average landings are the combination of landings reported from territorial/commonwealth and federal waters, the AMs only apply to federal waters.
- Triggers for implementing AMs are established, based upon a single year of landings in 2011 for applying AMs in 2012; an average of the 2011 and 2012 landings for applying AMs in 2013; and an average of the three most recent years of landings for applying AMs in subsequent years (e.g., average landings for 2011, 2012, and 2013 for triggering application of AMs in 2014).
- There can be a substantial delay between the harvest year and the year in which the data become available for analysis and application to AM determinations.
  - At present, that delay is approximately two years in the U.S. Caribbean.

#### **Why such a lengthy gap between the year of harvest and the year of application?**

- All fishermen’s trip tickets must be submitted to local government fisheries agencies and the required timeline for such submissions varies between Puerto Rico (monthly) and the United States Virgin Islands (yearly).
- Then, the data must be compiled by the individual territory/commonwealth and passed on to the National Marine Fisheries Service Science Center.
- The Science Center then must further compile the data, assure its quality, enter it into the appropriate data base, and conduct necessary analyses.
- NOAA and the local governments are working hard to shorten the time between submittal of the trip ticket and application of the data to a determination of the status of each fishery.
  - The goal is to be able to make these AM determinations during the fishing year.

### **What remedies will be applied if AMs are triggered?**

- The AMs consist of shortening the fishing season in the first year following determination that the ACL for a specific island group/species group/sector has been exceeded.
  - The season reduction will stay in place until additional data indicate that it needs to be adjusted, and that adjustment can be to a shorter or longer season.
- The AMs include a provision that requires the Science Center and the Scientific and Statistical Committee to review the data and make a determination as to whether increased landings are apparent (due to better data collection) or real (due to increased harvest). If the former, then AMs may not be invoked despite an apparent overage of the ACL.

### **What if the landings fall below the ACL?**

- If fewer reef fish or queen conch are harvested than is allowed by the island/species/sector ACL, then that surplus will not be added to the following year's ACL.

### **ADDITIONAL MANAGEMENT ACTIONS**

#### **What changes are made to the fishery management units?**

- Creole-fish is removed from Grouper Unit 3;
- Black grouper is added to Grouper Unit 4;
- Yellowedge and misty grouper are transferred from Grouper Unit 4 to new Grouper Unit 5;
- Wenchman is moved from Snapper Unit 2 to Snapper Unit 1;
- Cardinal snapper is added to Snapper Unit 2.

#### **Why is there a prohibition on harvest of midnight, blue, and rainbow parrotfish?**

- NOAA's Fisheries Service has a responsibility to not only protect threatened species of coral (i.e., staghorn and elkhorn corals are listed as a threatened species), but to protect the habitat upon which these corals depend.
- The three species of parrotfish for which harvest is being prohibited are particularly effective grazers, and they are the three largest and therefore slowest reproducing of the Caribbean parrotfish species.
- Expert testimony cites a decline in abundance of midnight, blue and rainbow parrotfish, and states concern about losing the important grazing role they play in conditioning substrate for the colonization of corals.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

#### **When will the changes take effect?**

- The final rule published in the *Federal Register* on December 30, 2011 (76 FR 82404).
- Measures contained with the 2010 Caribbean Annual Catch Limit Amendment are effective January 30, 2012.

#### **Where can I find more information about ACLs and AMs?**

- For general information, please see the [Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures Frequently Asked Questions](#)

#### **How can I participate in Caribbean fisheries management?**

- For more information about current regulations and opportunities to become involved in the Council process, visit: <http://www.caribbeanfmc.com/>