

## 2011 CARIBBEAN ANNUAL CATCH LIMIT AMENDMENT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

December 2011

### What fisheries will be affected by the 2011 Caribbean Annual Catch Limit?

- Amendments will be made to the following Fishery Management Plans:
  - Fishery Management Plan for the Queen Conch Resources of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands;
  - Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands;
  - Fishery Management Plan for the Spiny Lobster Fishery of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands;
  - Fishery Management Plan for Corals and Reef Associated Plants and Invertebrates of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

### What actions does the 2011 Caribbean Annual Catch Limit Rule contain?

- Specifies annual catch limits (amount of fish that can be taken without triggering accountability measures) to prevent overfishing (rate of removal too high) of managed species and species groups (Table 1).
- 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 that the annual catch limit has been exceeded.
- Defines triggers for implementing accountability measures.
- Subdivides federal waters of the U.S. Caribbean for purposes of tracking catch and applying accountability measures.
- 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.
- Treats the recreational and commercial fishing sectors separately in Puerto Rico, where sector-specific landings data are available, but not in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) where recreational harvest data are not collected.
- Revises management measures for aquarium trade species and conch species within the Reef Fish, Corals and Reef and Associated Plants and Invertebrates and Queen Conch Fishery Management Plans.
- Revises management reference points and overfished and overfishing status determination criteria.
- Establishes recreational bag limits for reef fish and spiny lobster species in Puerto Rico:
  - Allows for an aggregate harvest of no more than five reef fish per person per day (of which no more than one can be surgeonfish) and no more than 15 reef fish per vessel per day (of which no more than four can be surgeonfish) in federal waters; and
  - Allows for an aggregate harvest of no more than three spiny lobster per person per day and no more than 10 spiny lobster per vessel per day in federal waters.

### To what areas will the 2011 Caribbean Annual Catch Limit 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 USVI, 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.

**Table 1. Annual Catch Limits for the Caribbean\***

	Puerto Rico		St. Croix	St. Thomas/St. John
	Commercial Sector	Recreational Sector		
Fishery Management Unit (FMU)	Annual Catch Limit Pounds	Annual Catch Limit Pounds (Number of Fish)	Annual Catch Limit Pounds	Annual Catch Limit Pounds
Angelfish	8,984	4,492 (1,667)	305	7,897
Boxfish	86,115	4,616 (2,810)	8,433	27,880
Goatfishes	17,565	362 (814)	3,766	320
Grunts	182,396	5,028 (11,531)	36,881	37,617
Wrasses	54,147	5,050 (4,613)	7	585
Jacks	86,059	51,001 (37,945)	15,489	52,907
Scups & Porgies	24,739	2,577 (3,079)	4,638	21,819
Squirrelfish	16,663	3,891 (8,510)	121	4,241
Surgeonfish <sup>1</sup>	7,179	3,590 (5,365)	33,603	29,249
Triggerfish & Filefish	58,475	21,929 (11,620)	24,980	74,447
Spiny Lobster	327,920	N/A	107,307	104,199
	<b>U.S. Caribbean Exclusive Economic Zone</b>			
	<b>Annual Catch Limit</b>			
<sup>1</sup> Tilefish	14,642			
<sup>1</sup> Aquarium Trade	8,155			

\* Pounds of whole fish

<sup>1</sup>The annual catch limit for the Tilefish FMU and the aquarium trade species is a single value set for the entire Caribbean exclusive economic zone.

## **ANNUAL CATCH LIMITS**

### **What is an Annual Catch Limit?**

- An annual catch limit is the level of annual catch of a population, or population complex that, if met or exceeded, triggers accountability measures such as a reduction in the length of the fishing year.
- In the U.S. Caribbean, annual catch limits are set separately for each of three islands groups:
  - Puerto Rico
  - St. Thomas and St. John
  - St. Croix.
- Annual catch limits can apply to a single species of fish (e.g., spiny lobster) or to a group of species (e.g., jacks, wrasses).
- Separate annual catch limits 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 annual catch limit for a species or species complex.

## **What Caribbean species require annual catch limits and accountability measures in 2011?**

- Reef Fish:
  - angelfish, boxfish, goatfish, grunts, hogfish, jacks, scups and porgies, squirrelfish, surgeonfish, triggerfish and tilefish
- Spiny Lobster
- Aquarium trade species in both the Reef Fish and the Coral and Reef Associated Plants and Invertebrates Fishery Management Plans.

## **How were the Annual Catch Limits for 2011 determined for species in the U.S. Caribbean?**

- Annual catch limits were set based upon average or median landings during defined time periods.
- The time period during which average or median catch is calculated for those species is:
  - 1988-2009 for the commercial sector of Puerto Rico (median);
  - 2000-2009 for the recreational sector of Puerto Rico (median);
  - 1999-2008 for the commercial sector St. Croix (average); and
  - 2000-2008 for the commercial sector of St. Thomas/St. John (average).
- Average catches were adjusted downward to account for uncertainty in the scientific and management process.
  - Average or median landings of angelfish and surgeonfish were adjusted downward by 25 percent to account for the herbivore functions of these species benefiting the coral ecosystem;
  - In addition, a similar approach was taken to reduce the annual catch limit for aquarium trade species by 25 percent to account for the lack of historical information about this fishery sector;
  - Average or median landings of all other concerned species were adjusted downward by 10 percent;
  - Uncertainty stems from the vagaries of data reporting and time lags in application of corrections in response to changing patterns of catch.
- Note that separate annual catch limits for the recreational sector are only being set for Puerto Rico because recreational harvest data are only available for that island.
- Recreational harvest in the USVI will be determined by the commercial annual catch limit.
  - When the commercial fishery reaches the annual catch limit for any species or species group on any USVI island, accountability measures will be applied to both the commercial and recreational fisheries for that species or species group for that island.
  - When recreational harvest data become available in the USVI, annual catch limits will be developed for the recreational sector on those islands using the newly available data.

## **How can Annual Catch Limits 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**

### **What are the triggers for implementing accountability measures in the Caribbean?**

- Accountability measures are triggered if actual average or median landings exceed the established annual catch limit.
- The landings used include both those reported from territorial/commonwealth waters and those reported from federal waters.
  - For example, the queen conch annual catch limit 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 accountability measures only apply to federal waters.
- Triggers for implementing accountability measures are established, based upon a single year of landings in 2011 for applying accountability measures in 2012; an average of the 2011 and 2012 landings for applying accountability measures in 2013; and an average of the three most recent years of landings for applying accountability measures in subsequent years (e.g., average landings for 2011, 2012, and 2013 for triggering application of accountability measures 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 accountability measures 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 USVI (yearly).
- Then, the data must be compiled by the individual territory/commonwealth and passed on to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center.
  - Recently implemented electronic transmission will expedite the transfer of data from the territory/commonwealth to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center.
- The Southeast Fisheries Science Center then must further compile the data, assure its quality, enter it into the appropriate data base, and conduct necessary analyses.
- NOAA Fisheries Service 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 accountability measure determinations during the fishing year.

#### **What remedies will be applied if accountability measures are triggered?**

- The accountability measures consist of shortening the fishing season in the first year following a determination that the annual catch limit 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 accountability measures include a provision that requires the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and the Caribbean Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee 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 accountability measures may not be invoked despite an apparent overage of the annual catch limit.

#### **What if the landings fall below the annual catch limit?**

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

## **ADDITIONAL MANAGEMENT ACTIONS**

### **What changes to the conch resources are made by the 2011 Caribbean Annual Catch Limit final rule?**

- The final rule will remove eight species of conch from federal management:
  - Milk conch, *Strombus costatus*
  - West Indian Fighting Conch, *Strombus pugilis*
  - Roostertail Conch, *Strombus gallus*
  - Hawkwing Conch, *Strombus raninus*
  - True Tulip, *Fasciolaria tulipa*
  - Atlantic Triton's Trumpet, *Charonia variegata*
  - Cameo Helmet, *Cassis madagascarensis*
  - Green Start Shell, *Astrea tuber*
- These species are not targeted for harvest and are not collected in significant numbers.

### **What changes are made to aquarium trade species?**

- Management of aquarium trade species currently resides within the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan and Coral and Reef Associated Plants and Invertebrates Fishery Management Plan.
- The 2011 Caribbean Annual Catch Limit Amendment recommends the Caribbean Council remove all aquarium trade species from both Fishery Management Plans and create a new Fishery Management Plan.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

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

- The final rule published in the *Federal Register* on December 30, 2011 (76 FR 82414).
- Measures contained with the 2010 Caribbean Annual Catch Limit Amendment are effective January 30, 2012.

### **Where can I find more information about annual catch limits and accountability measures?**

- 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/>