



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701

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NOAA Fisheries Seeks Comments on a Proposed Rule to Modify Management of Queen Conch in Federal Waters of the U.S. Caribbean

Comment Period Ends July 8, 2013

NOAA Fisheries is seeking public comment on a proposed rule to implement Regulatory Amendment 2 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Queen Conch Resources of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). The proposed rule for Regulatory Amendment 2 published in the *Federal Register* on June 7, 2013 (78 FR 34310). The comment period ends on **July 8, 2013**.

Fishing for and possession of queen conch in federal waters of the U.S. Caribbean is limited to the area of Lang Bank, to the east of St. Croix, USVI, and only from November 1 through May 31 each year. Current commercial trip limits and recreational bag limits for the harvest of queen conch in federal waters are not compatible with USVI regulations. The purpose of Regulatory Amendment 2 is to improve the compatibility of federal and USVI territorial regulations for queen conch in order to facilitate enforcement efforts while ensuring the long-term health of the queen conch resource.

The proposed rule would revise the commercial trip limit for queen conch in U.S. Caribbean federal waters to be compatible with the trip limit in USVI territorial waters. The proposed rule would change the commercial trip limit in federal waters to 200 queen conch per vessel per day instead of the current 150 queen conch per licensed commercial fisher per day.

The Caribbean Fishery Management Council decided to leave the recreational bag limit unchanged because increasing the bag limit to make it compatible with the USVI would only slightly facilitate law enforcement efforts, but may negatively impact the continued health of the queen conch resource.

Request for Comments

NOAA Fisheries must receive comments on this proposed rule **no later than July 8, 2013**. Comments received by NOAA Fisheries will be addressed in the final rule.

Electronic copies of the regulatory amendment and the proposed rule may be obtained from the NOAA Fisheries Web site:

http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/caribbean/conch/reg_am2/index.html, the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal at: www.regulations.gov, or the Caribbean Fishery Management Council's Web site at: www.caribbeanfmc.com.

How to Submit Comments

You may submit comments by either of the following methods. Comments received through other means may not be considered.

Electronic Submissions: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal.

- Go to: www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2013-0068
- Click on "Comment Now!". Complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.
- Attachments to electronic comments (up to 10 MB) will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

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All comments will be part of the public record, and generally posted for public viewing to www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter, may be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information. Anonymous comments will be accepted.