



# Development of a Comprehensive Fishery Management Plan for the Exclusive Economic Zone of St. Croix.

## Scoping Document



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# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 What is scoping?.....	1
1.2 How does scoping affects fisheries management?.....	1
1.4 What action is being proposed? .....	2
1.5 Where is this project located?.....	2
1.6 Why is the Council developing a Comprehensive FMP for St. Croix? .....	3
<b>Chapter 2. Potential Actions .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Action 1: Establish the fishery management units (FMUs) for the comprehensive St. Croix fishery management plan (FMP). .....	6
Action 2: Revise the species composition of the comprehensive St. Croix FMP. ....	7
Action 3: Establish management reference points for any new species added to the comprehensive St. Croix FMP.....	7
Action 4: Modify or Establish Additional Management Measures.....	8
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Scoping Meetings Times and Location .....</b>	<b>9</b>

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1-1.</b> Jurisdictional boundaries of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council in St. Croix. The dotted line represents the boundary between St. Croix territorial waters and EEZ waters.....	2
<b>Figure 1-2.</b> Conceptual idea and steps for shifting from species-based fisheries management to island-based management in the U.S. Caribbean.....	4

## List of Tables

<b>Table 1-1.</b> Annual Catch Limit (ACL) values in pounds (lbs) for St. Croix by fishery management unit as defined in the 2010 and 2011 Caribbean ACL Amendments. ..	5
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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1 What is scoping?

Scoping is the process the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (Council) use to request feedback from the public on actions they may undertake that will result in changes to the management of federal fisheries in the U.S. Caribbean. During scoping, NMFS and the Council identify possible fishery issues and their potential impacts and discuss management options to address these issues. Scoping is the first opportunity for the public to make suggestions or raise issues to the Council before a fishery management plan (FMP) or an amendment to an existing plan is developed.

## 1.2 How does scoping affects fisheries management?

The Council uses public comments provided through scoping in the development of management options. Once management options are developed, the public hearing process will begin, and the public will have the opportunity to comment on the management alternatives included as options. The Council will consider public input as it deliberates and chooses the most appropriate management alternatives.

## 1.3 How to get involved?

There are many ways the public can help the Council. One way is to identify fishery management needs and develop reasonable management alternatives. The first step to getting involved is to become familiar with the management process by visiting <http://www.caribbeanfmc.com/>. Contact the Council members and staff to discuss your questions or concerns. The public may also attend meetings and serve on panels and committees that advise the Council on fishery issues. For more information on how to participate, please call 787-766-5926.

### *Caribbean Fishery Management Council*

- Responsible for conservation and management of U.S. Caribbean fish stocks.
- Consists of seven voting members:
  - Four voting members appointed by the Secretary of Commerce
  - One voting member appointed by each of the Governors of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands
  - The Regional Administrator of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for the Southeast Region.
- Manages the area from 3 to 200 nautical miles (nm) off the coasts of the U.S. Virgin Islands, and 9 to 200 nm off the coast of Puerto Rico.
- Develops fishery management plans and recommends regulations to NMFS and the Secretary of Commerce for implementation.

## 1.4 What action is being proposed?

The Council is proposing to develop a new comprehensive fishery management plan (FMP) for the island of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, (USVI). The FMP for St. Croix will incorporate, and modify if needed, the present federal fisheries management measures in each of the existing species based FMPs (Spiny Lobster; Reef Fish; Coral; and Queen Conch FMPs for Puerto Rico and the USVI). The goal of the action is to develop an FMP tailored to the specific fishery management needs of St. Croix. If approved, this new St. Croix FMP, in conjunction with similar comprehensive FMPs being developed for each of Puerto Rico and St. Thomas/St. John, will replace the Spiny Lobster, Reef Fish, Coral, and Queen Conch FMPs.

## 1.5 Where is this project located?

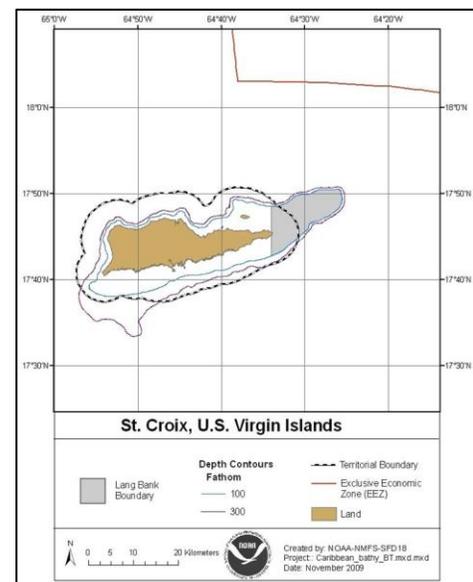
The area under consideration for this project is the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off the coast of St. Croix, USVI, defined as the marine waters located between 3-200 nautical miles (nm) (Figure 1-1).

### *Purpose for Action*

*The purpose of this action is to develop a new comprehensive island-based fishery management plan for St. Croix, USVI. The Council will identify actions and alternatives to develop the new plan and will consider the implications of those actions and alternatives with respect to environmental and social consequences, and to promulgate the regulations necessary to effect the new island-based management approach.*

### *Need for Action*

*Each of the U.S. Caribbean islands has unique characteristics with respect to culture, markets, gear, ecology and seafood preferences. There is a need to account for these differences within the fishery management process in the U.S. Caribbean.*



**Figure 1-1.** Jurisdictional boundaries of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council in St. Croix. The dotted line represents the boundary between St. Croix territorial waters and EEZ waters.

## **1.6 Why is the Council developing a Comprehensive FMP for St. Croix?**

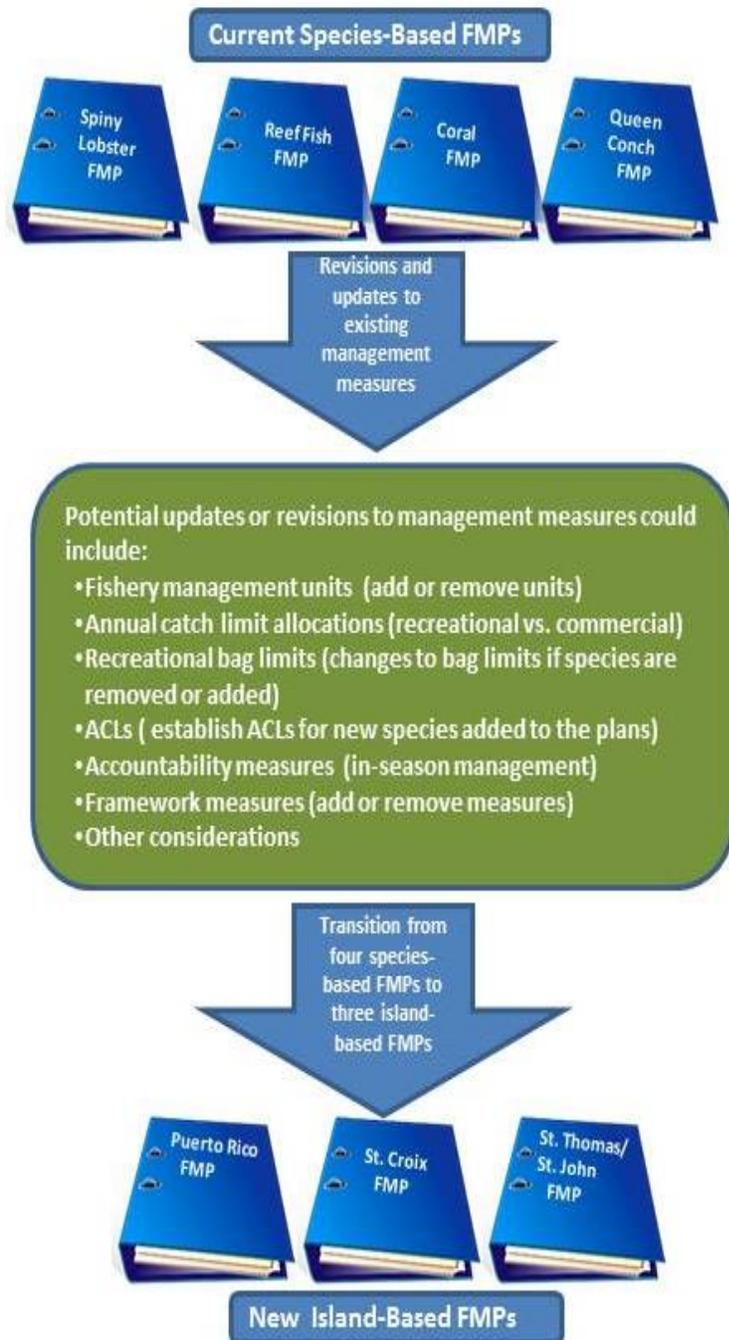
Historically, the Council has managed federal fisheries in the U.S. Caribbean through four species-based FMPs (Spiny Lobster, Reef Fish, Coral, and Queen Conch). Fishers, fishing community representatives, and the local governments of Puerto Rico and the USVI have frequently requested the Council to consider the differences between the islands or island groups when addressing fisheries management in the U.S. Caribbean. In response to these requests, the Council scheduled numerous scoping meetings in 2012 to discuss the idea of managing federal fisheries by island or island group rather than by species.

At the scoping meetings, the Council presented different options on how to restructure the management of federal fisheries in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ. Based on the different options presented, the public expressed their preference for shifting the management of federal fisheries from a species-based to an island-based approach. Furthermore, the public expressed their desire to replace the existing species-based FMPs with new comprehensive FMPs for each of Puerto Rico, St. Croix, and St. Thomas/St. John (Figure 1-2). The Council believes that these island-based FMPs could

better address the differences in ecosystems, culture, markets, gear, and seafood preferences among the U.S. Caribbean islands.

At this time, the Council would like to move forward with a new round of scoping meetings to receive public feedback on possible actions and alternatives to consider during the development of the new St. Croix FMP. The Council could develop the new comprehensive FMP for St. Croix without significant changes to current federal fisheries management. For example, the 2010 and 2011 Caribbean Annual Catch Limit (ACL) Amendments established ACLs by island or island group with specific ACLs for the St. Croix EEZ (Table 1-1). The spatial and species-based attributes of these St. Croix ACLs, more than likely, would not change when developing the new FMP.

However, a re-arrangement from species-based FMPs to island-based FMPs also provides the opportunity for updating regulations that are outdated or that do not reflect the current state of issues in the U.S. Caribbean. For example, the Council could modify the species managed by removing or adding fishery management units in the new FMP. Additional analyses to assess the impacts to the social, biological, economic, ecological, and administrative environments would be required if regulations are to be changed.



**Figure 1-2.** Conceptual idea and steps for shifting from species-based fisheries management to island-based management in the U.S. Caribbean.

The new comprehensive FMP would contain all the necessary elements outlined in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act SEC 303(a)). In addition, it would reflect events specific to St. Croix, with minimal impact to St. Thomas/St. John and Puerto Rico. Because future actions would be specific to St. Croix, they would better respond to St. Croix’s economic and cultural considerations. Thus, if effected, the proposed FMP will allow the Council to address plan changes and regulations more efficiently. It would also make it easier for constituents to understand those changes within the context of their culture and environment.

**Table 1-1.** Annual Catch Limit (ACL) values in pounds (lbs) for St. Croix by fishery management unit as defined in the 2010 and 2011 Caribbean ACL Amendments.

<b>Fishery Management Unit (FMU)</b>	<b>ACL (lbs)</b>
Queen Conch	50,000
Parrotfish	240,000
Snapper	102,946
Grouper	30,435
Angelfish	305
Boxfish	8,433
Goatfishes	3,766
Grunts	36,881
Wrasses	7
Jacks	15,489
Scups & Porgies	4,638
Squirrelfish	121
Surgeonfish	33,603
Triggerfish & Filefish	24,980
Spiny Lobster	107,307
*Tilefish	14,642
*Aquarium Trade	8,155

\* U.S. Caribbean EEZ wide ACL

## Chapter 2. Potential Actions

### **Action 1: Establish the fishery management units (FMUs) for the comprehensive St. Croix fishery management plan (FMP).**

The Caribbean Fishery Management Council (Council) may choose to transfer the presently established FMUs contained in the Spiny Lobster, Reef Fish, Corals and Reef Associated Plants and Invertebrates, and Queen Conch FMPs into the new FMP intact. The 2010 and 2011 Caribbean Annual Catch Limit (ACL) Amendments modified some species groupings and units. For example, the 2010 Caribbean ACL Amendment modified Grouper Unit 4 (yellowfin, red, tiger, yellowedge, and misty) by splitting the unit into Grouper Unit 4 (yellowfin, red, tiger, and black) and Grouper Unit 5 (yellowedge and misty). Developing a comprehensive island-based FMP for St. Croix provides the opportunity to further redefine these FMUs, as warranted. For example, historically, there are low harvest levels of species in the wrasses FMU in St. Croix. Development of the new St. Croix FMP would provide an opportunity to reassess the need for federal management (within a fishery context) of wrasses species and adjust the FMU accordingly (Table 1-1). Moving forward with the development of this comprehensive FMP, some potential questions the Council could discuss at the scoping meetings include:

Should the Council include in the comprehensive St. Croix FMP:

- All species currently under federal management?
- All species of coral reef resources currently under federal management in St. Croix exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters?
- All species of reef fish currently under federal management in St. Croix EEZ waters?
- Aquarium trade species in, and if so which species?
- Should the Council consider removing from federal management FMUs currently managed?

## **Action 2: Revise the species composition of the comprehensive St. Croix FMP.**

In St. Croix, there is considerable commercial harvest of non-federally managed species such as dorado/dolphinfish (*Coryphaena hippurus*) and wahoo (*Acanthocybium solandri*). The average yearly landings of dorado/dolphinfish recorded in St. Croix for the years 1998 - 2009 were 58,156 lbs and 15,639 lbs for wahoo. An unknown but potentially substantial (based on life history characteristics) proportion of this harvest is taking place in the EEZ. Based on the level of harvest and location of harvest, the Council may want to consider adding these and/or other species to the FMP. Incorporating species lacking previous federal management into a management plan would require new analyses of the impacts on the existing FMUs and the human environment. Moving forward with the development of this comprehensive FMP, some potential questions the Council could discuss at the scoping meeting include:

- Should the Council add species to or remove species from any of the presently existing St. Croix FMUs?
- Should the Council add an FMU for pelagic species, including for example dorado/dolphinfish and wahoo?
- Should the Council add other FMUs to the comprehensive St. Croix FMP, including for example mollusks, baitfish, or other important species presently not under federal fishery management?
- Should the Council discontinue the management of certain species that are currently managed within the Spiny Lobster, Reef Fish, Coral, and Queen Conch FMPs?

## **Action 3: Establish management reference points for any new species added to the comprehensive St. Croix FMP.**

In the event the Council adds new species (e.g., dorado/dolphin fish, ballyhoo, barracuda, octopus) to the St. Croix FMP, reference points would have to be determined and established for these species in order to comply with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requirements (e.g., status determination criteria (SDC); maximum sustainable yield (MSY); acceptable biological catch (ABC); ACL). Moving forward with the development of this comprehensive FMP, some potential questions the Council could discuss at the scoping meeting include:

- What years of landings data will the Council use to establish these reference points?
- What level of reduction will the Council apply to the ABC to define the ACLs and account for management uncertainty?
- What type of accountability measures will be established for these new species?

#### **Action 4: Modify or Establish Additional Management Measures.**

The goal of this initiative is to restructure management measures from the existing FMPs (Spiny Lobster, Reef Fish, Coral, and Queen Conch) into new island or island group FMPs. Developing the comprehensive St. Croix FMP is unlikely to result in significant changes to the current management measures. However, changes could occur if there is new information available that shows a need to update or modify current management measures or to add new measures.

### **Summary**

The scoping process is designed to obtain input from fishers, the general public, and the local agencies representatives on these and other action and alternatives considered by the Council. For example, the scoping process will allow the Council to share with the public the extent of actions, the range of alternatives, and types of impacts to be evaluated when developing the Comprehensive FMP of St. Croix. There will also be further opportunities for the public to submit comments and suggestions. Based on the public participation and input in the development of the new FMP, the Council will identify and eliminate issues determined to be insignificant or that could be addressed in other documents.

# Scoping Meetings Times and Location

The Council will be collecting input on this proposed action at a series of meetings across the U.S. Caribbean. Below are the start times and location for each of the planned scoping meetings:

## Island-Based Scoping Meetings in Puerto Rico (Monday – Friday)

- July 8, 2013 7:00 pm - at the Centro de Usos Múltiples de Vieques, Calle Antonio G. Mellado, Vieques, Puerto Rico.
- July 9, 2013 7:00 pm - at the Double Tree by Hilton San Juan, De Diego Avenue, San Juan, Puerto Rico.
- July 10, 2013 2:00 pm - at the Holiday Inn Ponce & Tropical Casino, 3315 Ponce By Pass, Ponce, Puerto Rico.
- July 10, 2013 7:00 pm - at the Holiday Inn, 2701 Hostos Avenue, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico.
- July 11, 2013 7:00 pm - at the Asociación de Pescadores Unidos de Playa Hucaras in Naguabo, Puerto Rico.
- July 12, 2013 6:00 pm – at the Club Náutico de Arecibo, Carr, 681 Km. 1.4, Barrio Islote, Sector Vigía, Arecibo, Puerto Rico.

## Island-Based Scoping Meetings in the USVI (Tuesday-Wednesday)

- July 9, 2013 7:00 pm - at the Buccaneer Hotel, Estate Shoys, Christiansted, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.
- July 10, 2013 7:00 pm - at the Holiday Inn (Windward Passage Hotel) Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.



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