

**National Marine Fisheries Service  
Southeast Fisheries Science Center Panama City, FL Laboratory  
Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP)**

*Describe Habitat Utilization and Life History Characteristics of Deep-Water Snappers  
Targeted by the Deep-Water Snapper Fishery in Puerto Rico*

This EFP is issued to the National Marine Fisheries Service’s (NMFS) Southeast Fisheries Science Center Panama City, Florida Laboratory in accordance with procedures established at 50 CFR 600.745(b). The EFP authorizes the NMFS staff and contracted commercial fishermen aboard contracted commercial fishing vessels, as listed in Appendix 1, to collect reef fish species in waters of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone off Puerto Rico, as described in the attached Terms and Conditions (Appendix 2).

The EFP exempts NMFS staff and commercial fishermen (Appendix 1) from regulations found at 50 CFR 622.435(a)(1)(i)-(iii) (Seasonal Closure) and 622.435(a)(2)(iv) (Area Closure), and 622.437(b)(1) (Bag Limits), as described in Appendix 2. This exemption applies to U.S. Caribbean waters under federal jurisdiction. Collection efforts planned to be conducted in waters under Puerto Rico’s jurisdiction should be authorized through the appropriate government authorities, as required.

The EFP is valid from the date of issuance through August 1, 2021, when signed by both the Regional Administrator and the authorized representative of NMFS Panama City Lab, and becomes effective on the later of the two signature dates (50 CFR 600.745(b)(4)).

All vessels engaging in the activities authorized pursuant to this EFP must have a copy of this EFP onboard. As specified in 50 CFR 600.745(b)(9), failure to comply with any of the conditions in Appendix 2 may be grounds for revocation, suspension, or modification of the EFP with respect to all persons and vessels conducting activities under the EFP.

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Signature	Date Signed
Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D. Regional Administrator National Marine Fisheries Service	

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Signature	Date Signed
Katherine Overly, EFP Holder	
As set forth in 50 CFR 600.745(b)(4), by signing this document, the EFP Holder agrees to comply with all terms and conditions, outlined in Appendix 2, of this permit, and all restrictions and relevant regulations. This includes agreeing that the owners and crews of the participating vessels identified in the attached Appendix 1 will comply with the terms and conditions of this permit.	

## Appendix 1

*List of Participating Vessels and Participants in the National Marine Fisheries Service  
Southeast Fisheries Science Center Panama City, FL Laboratory Exempted Fishing Permit*

### *List of Participating Vessels*

<b><u>Vessel Name</u></b>	<b><u>Vessel ID</u></b>	<b><u>Owner/Operator</u></b>
F/V Mi Familia	PR 3394 FF	Capt. Edwin E. Font

### *List of Participating Individuals*

Katherine Overly  
Andrew David  
Steve Smith  
Ryan Caillouet  
Edwin Font  
Michelle Scherer  
Carlos Zayas

## Appendix 2

### *Terms and Conditions*

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)  
Southeast Fisheries Science Center Panama City, FL Laboratory  
Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP)

Describe Habitat Utilization and Life History Characteristics of Deep-Water Snappers Targeted by the Deep-Water Snapper Fishery in Puerto Rico

#### A. PURPOSE.

This EFP will allow NMFS staff to use stereo video imagery to collection information that could be used to identify essential fish habitat of deep-water snapper species off the coast of Puerto Rico and to collect biological samples in order to determine the annual reproductive cycle, growth estimations, and age and size at sexual maturation of the queen snapper (*Etelis oculatus*), blackfin snapper (*Lutjanus buccanella*), silk snapper (*Lutjanus vivanus*), and black snapper (*Apsilius dentatus*).

#### B. BACKGROUND.

The Caribbean Fishery Management Council (Council) has ranked investigations into the deep-water snapper fishery at the highest priority level for deep-water research in their region (NOAA Deep-Sea Coral Research and Technology Program, Priority Scoping Workshop for the Southeast Region, 2016-2019). All data collected will be used to provide guidance and management recommendations to the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources as well as the Council. In addition, the deep-water stereo video system will provide size and abundance data and diversity indices for these data poor species, as well as validating multi-beam mapping data previously collected for the region.

#### C. SCOPE OF WORK.

Project activities will be conducted from date of EFP issuance through August 1, 2021. Sampling will occur along the western coast of Puerto Rico from Isabela to Puerto Real, including Isla de Desecheo Marine Reserve. A total of 39 fishing trips will be conducted during the one-year project period, 15 of which will be in U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone waters off Puerto Rico (Puerto Rico EEZ). The remaining trips will be conducted in waters under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Sampling will occur at depths of 328 – 2,133 feet (100 – 650 meters) within 1 – 12 miles (1.6 – 19.3 kilometers) of the western coast of Puerto Rico and will use hook-and-line gear while adrift (i.e., no anchoring would occur). On each fishing trip, four to ten sites will be fished based on transit time and weather. Three vertical lines will be deployed per site, two to catch the targeted deep-water snappers (vertical fishing lines) and one to record deep-water species and habitats (vertical video line). Manual snapper reels will be used to retrieve each vertical line.

One vertical fishing line will be baited with fish and the other vertical fishing line will be baited with squid to test for differences in target species preference. The vertical fishing lines will be

fished simultaneously, and will each include twelve hooks, a weight, and small blinking LED light clipped to the bottom two meters of the line. The vertical video line will have a stereo video camera system and baited arm attached to the bottom two meters of the line. Once deployed, the video camera system will rest on the seafloor via tripod legs. At each site, the vertical video line will be deployed from the commercial fishing vessel for a 30 minute soak time and the vertical fishing line for a 20 minute soak time.<sup>1</sup>

Length measurements (total length and fork length) will be recorded for all targeted (queen, silk, blackfin, and black snapper) and non-targeted (vermillion, wenchman, and cardinal snapper; red hind, yellowfin, red, tiger, black, misty, and yellowedge grouper) deep-water reef fish species, except for prohibited species (goliath and Nassau grouper; midnight, rainbow, and blue parrotfish; 50 CFR 622.434), which will be returned immediately to the water with minimum harm. The gonads, eyes, and otoliths of the targeted species will be removed for histological and ageing analyses.

Reporting requirements under the EFP are included in Section E, below.

#### D. PERMIT EXEMPTIONS AND CONDITIONS.

NMFS has the ability to modify the conditions of the EFP or to end the project, to address bycatch or other issues, as warranted.

##### **Exemptions:**

1. Seasonal Closures (50 CFR § 622.435), consistent with conditions below.
  - a. February 1 – April 30 seasonal closure for red, black, tiger, yellowfin, or yellowedge groupers in the EEZ off Puerto Rico (50 CFR § 622.435(a)(1)(i)).
  - b. December 1 – last day of February seasonal closure for red hind grouper from the EEZ of Puerto Rico, west of 67°10' W. longitude (50 CFR § 622.435(a)(1)(ii)).
  - c. October 1 – December 31 seasonal closure for vermilion, black, silk, or blackfin snappers in the EEZ off Puerto Rico (50 CFR § 622.435(a)(1)(iii)).
2. Area Closure (50 CFR § 622.435(a)(2)(iv)), consistent with conditions below.
  - a. October 1 – March 31 closure of Bajo de Sico (prohibition on fishing for or possessing any Caribbean reef fish in or from those parts of the Bajo de Sico closed area that are in the EEZ off Puerto Rico).

The exemption is limited to the specified Targeted Species and Non-Targeted Species.

3. Bag Limit (50 CFR § 622.437(b)(1)), consistent with conditions below.

The exemption is limited to the specified Targeted Species.

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<sup>1</sup> The vertical fishing lines may be set/hailed up to five times within the 20-minute interval to allow for repositioning of the gear at sites with strong currents.

**Conditions:**

1. Project Period. The EFP is valid from the date of issuance through August 1, 2021. The conditions below apply during the Project Period.
2. Targeted Species. The following Targeted Species may be fished for and possessed during the applicable Seasonal and Area Closures and may be retained consistent with the bag limit exemption and total harvest limits below: queen snapper<sup>2</sup>, silk snapper, blackfin, snapper and black snapper.
  - a. Total Harvest Limits During the Project Period:
    - i. Up to 150 queen snapper
    - ii. Up to 120 silk snapper
    - iii. Up to 120 blackfin snapper
    - iv. Up to 60 black snapper
  - b. Daily Bag Limits During the Project Period:
    - i. Up to 15 queen snapper per person per day (30 per vessel per day)
    - ii. Up to 20 silk snapper per person per day (40 per vessel per day)
    - iii. Up to 10 blackfin snapper per person per day (20 per vessel per day)
    - iv. Up to 5 black snapper per person per day (10 per vessel per day)
  - c. During Applicable Seasonal and Area Closures: After samples are collected, the commercial fishermen listed in Appendix 1 may retain the Targeted Species for personal use and consumption, not for sale.
  - d. Outside Applicable Seasonal and Area Closures: After samples are collected, the commercial fishermen listed in Appendix 1 may retain the Targeted Species for personal use or sale, consistent with applicable law.
3. Non-Targeted Species. The following Non-Targeted Species may be possessed during the applicable Seasonal and Area Closures: vermillion snapper, wenchman snapper<sup>3</sup>, cardinal snapper<sup>4</sup>, red hind grouper, black grouper, red grouper, tiger grouper, yellowfin grouper, misty grouper<sup>5</sup>, and yellowedge grouper.
  - a. During Applicable Seasonal and Area Closures: Non-Targeted Species may be possessed for sufficient time to collect and record length measurements. Thereafter, they will be returned to the water with a minimum amount of harm.
  - b. Outside Applicable Seasonal and Area Closures: After length measurements are recorded, the commercial fishermen listed in Appendix 1 may retain the Non-Targeted Species for personal use or sale, consistent with applicable law.
4. Bajo de Sico Area Closure. A maximum of 25 trips may occur in Bajo de Sico during the Project Period.

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<sup>2</sup> There is no closed season for queen snapper.

<sup>3</sup> There is no closed season for wenchman snapper.

<sup>4</sup> There is no closed season for cardinal snapper.

<sup>5</sup> There is no closed season for misty grouper.

5. Activities under the EFP must be in compliance with the scope of work, described in Section C above, including:
  - Only hook-and-line (including attached cameras) gear is authorized to collect reef fish.
  - Vertical fishing line lengths should not be longer than necessary for the depth fished to ensure that the lower length of the fishing line does not lay flat along the bottom.
  - Fishing vessels need to carry proper de-hooking gear on board.
  - Nassau and goliath grouper, and midnight, blue, and rainbow parrotfish must be returned to the water immediately with minimum harm (50 CFR 622.434).
  - Anchoring is prohibited in federal waters of Bajo de Sico (50 CFR 622.435(b)(3)).
6. Each vessel shall carry on board and prominently display the EFP. The EFP must be presented for inspection upon request of any authorized law enforcement officer.

#### E. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AND DATA DISSEMINATION.

The EFP holder and all participating vessels agree to the public release of aggregated information obtained as a result of activities conducted under this permit. The EFP holder shall submit the information listed below to NMFS in a final report, by **September 30, 2021**, to:

- Regional Administrator, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505.
- Director, NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center, 75 Virginia Beach Drive, Miami, Florida 33149.
- An electronic copy to sarah.stephenson@noaa.gov.

The final report must include the following information:

1. Gear
  - a. Detailed description of camera system (e.g., construction material, dimensions).
  - b. Report any lost gear.
2. Environmental Conditions
  - a. Latitude/longitude and depth of each sample site.
  - b. General habitat description of each sample site (from video collected via camera system).
  - c. Number of sample sites in Bajo de Sico by jurisdiction (i.e., federal, territorial).
3. Catch Information
  - a. Bait type used, or specify if no bait is used.
  - b. Number, length, weight (if recorded), disposition (kept or discarded), and species identification of all fish caught.
  - c. Number of biological samples collected for the four Targeted Species.
  - d. Number of fish caught during seasonal or area closures.

#### 4. Protected Species

- a. Number and species identification of all Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species caught.<sup>6</sup>
- b. Any ESA-listed species interactions must be immediately reported to the NMFS Protected Resources Division at 727-824-5312.
- c. Any entangled marine mammal or incidental injury or mortality to a marine mammal should be reported to the Marine Mammal Authorization Program within 48 hours. Reporting forms can be found at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/interactions/mmap/>.

#### F. CONSERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS.

NMFS recommends the following best practices, but they are not required as a condition of this permit:

1. Avoid sampling during conditions that would increase gear interactions with bottom (e.g., during high winds or high seas).
2. If ESA-listed species are present at targeted sampling site, then abort or relocate fishing activities.

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<sup>6</sup> The list of threatened and endangered species and critical habitat under NMFS jurisdiction for Puerto Rico can be found here: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/consultations/puerto-rico>.