UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PROGRAM PLANNING AND INTEGRATION
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

MAR 8 2011

To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups:

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an environmental review has been performed on the following action.

TITLE: Regulatory Amendment to the Fishery Management Plan for Queen Conch Resources of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Establishing Compatible Closures

LOCATION: Lang Bank, Caribbean Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

SUMMARY: At the June 2009 meeting, the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (Council) voted to amend the Fishery Management Plan for Queen Conch Resources of Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands (U.S.V.I.) to establish compatible regulations with U.S.V.I. territorial regulations. At the September 2010 meeting, the Council voted to submit the regulatory amendment to the Secretary for review. Currently, fishing for and possession of queen conch is prohibited in the Caribbean EEZ, with the exception of an area known as Lang Bank east of St. Croix, which is open to harvest of queen conch from October 1 through June 30. In St. Croix, U.S.V.I. territorial waters, queen conch is managed under a 50,000 pound quota and a seasonal closure from June 1 through October 31. The rule will implement compatible closures with the U.S.V.I. territorial regulations to close the queen conch fishery after the local government has determined the quota in St. Croix has been reached. The rule will also extend the seasonal closure in federal waters to June 1 through October 31, each year, consistent with the territorial seasonal closure.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL: Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D., Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
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727-824-5305

The environmental review process led us to conclude that this action will not have a significant impact on the environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement was not prepared. A copy of the finding of no significant impact (FONSI), including the environmental assessment (EA), is enclosed for your information.

Although NOAA is not soliciting comments on this completed EA/FONSI, we will consider any comments submitted that would assist us in preparing future NEPA documents. Please submit any written comments to the Responsible Official named above.

Sincerely,

for Paul N. Doremus, Ph. D.
NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure

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