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

AUG 2 3 2013

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 2 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Queen Conch Resources of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI): Compatibility of Trip and Bag Limits in the Management Area of St. Croix, USVI [RIN 0648-BD15]

LOCATION: United States Caribbean Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

SUMMARY: Regulatory Amendment 2 considers establishing federal regulations compatible with USVI territorial regulations for the commercial and recreational harvest of queen conch. Fishing for and possession of queen conch in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ is only allowed in the area of Lang Bank, to the east of St. Croix, USVI. Current commercial trip limits and recreational bag limits for the harvest of queen conch in federal waters are not compatible with USVI regulations. The USVI government has expressed interest in having federal regulations modified to make them compatible with the territorial limits to facilitate enforcement efforts, enhance compliance by fishers, and allow for more efficient management of queen conch resources in the U.S. Caribbean. This regulatory amendment modifies the commercial trip limit but leaves the recreational bag limit unchanged. Regulatory Amendment 2 modifies the commercial trip limit to 200 queen conch per vessel per day from the current 150 queen conch per licensed commercial fisher per day. Compatibility with the USVI's commercial regulations is expected to reduce confusion among fishers and increase law enforcement efficiency. The lower federal recreational bag limit was maintained because increasing the recreational bag limit would only slightly facilitate law enforcement efforts, but may negatively impact the continued health of the queen conch resource.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL:

Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
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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.

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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,

Patricia A. Montanio
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure

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