



**NOAA  
FISHERIES**

# Framework Action 3 under the St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John Fishery Management Plans:

Modification of Status Determination Criteria and Reference Points based  
on the SEDAR 80 Queen Triggerfish Stock Assessments

Sarah Stephenson, NMFS-SERO Caribbean Branch

185<sup>th</sup> Caribbean Fishery Management Council Meeting

December 4-5, 2024



# Current Management of Queen Triggerfish

- Under both the St. Croix FMP and the St. Thomas/St. John FMP, queen triggerfish is managed as an individual stock (i.e., not managed in a group with other species).
- In each FMP, queen triggerfish is classified as a Tier 4a stock under the Council's Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule.
  - Data Limited: No Accepted Assessment Available and relatively low vulnerability to fishing pressure.
  - Sustainable yield level specified as the overfishing limit proxy.
- Annual catch limits (ACL) are based on commercial landings, and accountability measures (AM) apply to all fishing (commercial and recreational).
  - If ACLs are exceeded, AMs are actions designed to ensure that the ACL is not exceeded in the following year.

# Current Reference Points

**Table 1.1.** Queen triggerfish sustainable yield level (SYL), acceptable biological catch (ABC), and annual catch limit (ACL) under the St. Croix FMP and St. Thomas/St. John FMP.

FMP	SYL	ABC	ACL
St. Croix	45,158	22,579	21,450
St. Thomas/ St. John	205,621	102,810	97,670

Values are in pounds whole weight

# Background

- The Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) 80 for St. Croix queen triggerfish and St. Thomas/St. John queen triggerfish was completed in 2024.
- For queen triggerfish in both St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John, the assessments indicated that overfishing is not occurring.
- The stock assessments were not able to estimate the overfished status for queen triggerfish in St. Croix or St. Thomas/St. John; thus, their overfished status remains unknown.
- The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed results from SEDAR 80 at their April 2024 meeting and supported the stock assessments as providing the best scientific information available and determined that each stock assessment was suitable for management advice.

# Background Continued

- The SSC in consultation with NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Fisheries Science Center (Science Center) supported that queen triggerfish under each FMP be reclassified from a Tier 4a stock to a Tier 3 stock (Data Limited: Accepted Assessment Available) under the Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule.
- The SSC coordinated with the Science Center to set overfishing limit and acceptable biological catch values for queen triggerfish under each FMP, for years 2024-2027.
- The SSC presented [acceptable biological catch recommendations](#) to the Council at the April 2024 Council meeting.
- The Council accepted those recommendations and directed staff to develop a framework action to the St. Croix FMP and the St. Thomas/St. John FMP to update reference points for queen triggerfish based on SEDAR 80.

# Council Decisions

- Through this framework action, the Council would set ACLs for queen triggerfish in St. Croix and in St. Thomas/St. John from the recommended acceptable biological catch values, reduced by a management uncertainty\* buffer.
  - \*Uncertainty in the ability of managers to constrain catch so the ACL is not exceeded, and the uncertainty in quantifying the true catch amounts (i.e., estimation errors).
- At this meeting, the Council will review the draft document (included in the meeting briefing book) and can select a preferred alternative for setting the queen triggerfish ACL for both St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John.
- A different alternative could be selected as preferred for each FMP.

# Purpose and Need Statements

- The purpose of this framework action is to update reference points for the queen triggerfish stocks under the St. Croix FMP and St. Thomas/St. John FMP to account for the SEDAR 80 stock assessments and application of the Council's Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule.
- The need for this action is to update management measures for the St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John queen triggerfish stocks based on best scientific information available to prevent overfishing and achieve optimum yield, consistent with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

# Action: Update Reference Points

- This framework action includes one action that would do the following under the St. Croix FMP and the St. Thomas/St. John FMP:
  - update the maximum sustainable yield or proxy, maximum fishing mortality threshold, and minimum stock size threshold based on results of SEDAR 80;
  - update the overfishing limit and acceptable biological catch values for years 2024-2027 (next slide); and
  - Set ACLs from the recommended acceptable biological catch for queen triggerfish.

# Overfishing Limit and Acceptable Biological Catch

**Table 1.2.** Overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) values recommended for the St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John queen triggerfish stocks for years 2024-2027, based on results of the accepted SEDAR 80 stock assessment.

Year	St. Croix		St. Thomas/St. John	
	OFL	ABC	OFL	ABC
2024	24,651	18,808	283,918	97,809
2025	22,773	18,808	193,378	97,809
2026	22,316	18,808	166,220	97,809
2027	22,025	18,808	148,223	97,809

Values are in pounds whole weight

# Proposed Alternatives

- **Alternative 1.** No Action. Reference points for the queen triggerfish stocks would remain as specified under the St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John FMPs (Table 2.1).
- **Alternative 2.** Update reference points for the queen triggerfish stocks based on SEDAR 80 and set the ACL (which equals OY) **equal to** the ABC recommended by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC).
- **Alternative 3.** Update reference points for the queen triggerfish stocks based on SEDAR 80 and set the ACL (which equals OY) **equal to 95%** of the ABC recommended by the Council's SSC.
- **Alternative 4.** Update reference points for the queen triggerfish stocks based on SEDAR 80 and set the ACL (which equals OY) **equal to 90%** of the ABC recommended by the Council's SSC.

Increased buffer from Alternative 1 to 4. Buffer accounts for managers' uncertainty in constraining catch to the ACL and quantifying true catch amounts (i.e., estimation errors).

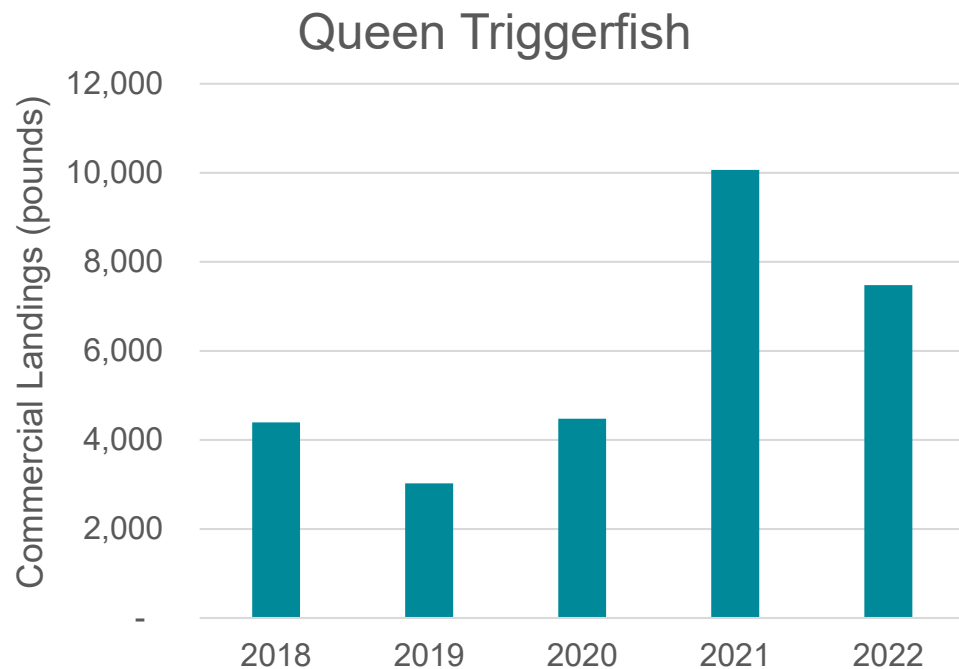
# Proposed Alternatives Continued

**Table 2.1.** Current and proposed ACLs for queen triggerfish in St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John.

Alternative	St. Croix	St. Thomas/St. John
Alt. 1 (no action)	21,450	97,670
Alt. 2 (0% reduction)	18,808	97,809
Alt. 3 (5% reduction)	17,868	92,919
Alt. 4 (10% reduction)	16,927	88,028

Values are in pounds whole weight

# Comparison of Alternatives – St. Croix



Alternative	ACL	Change
Alt. 1 (no action)	21,450	0
Alt. 2 (0% reduction)	18,808	-2,642
Alt. 3 (5% reduction)	17,868	-3,582
Alt. 4 (10% reduction)	16,927	-4,523

See Table 3.3.2 in Framework Action 3 document for landings of queen triggerfish reported in St. Croix.

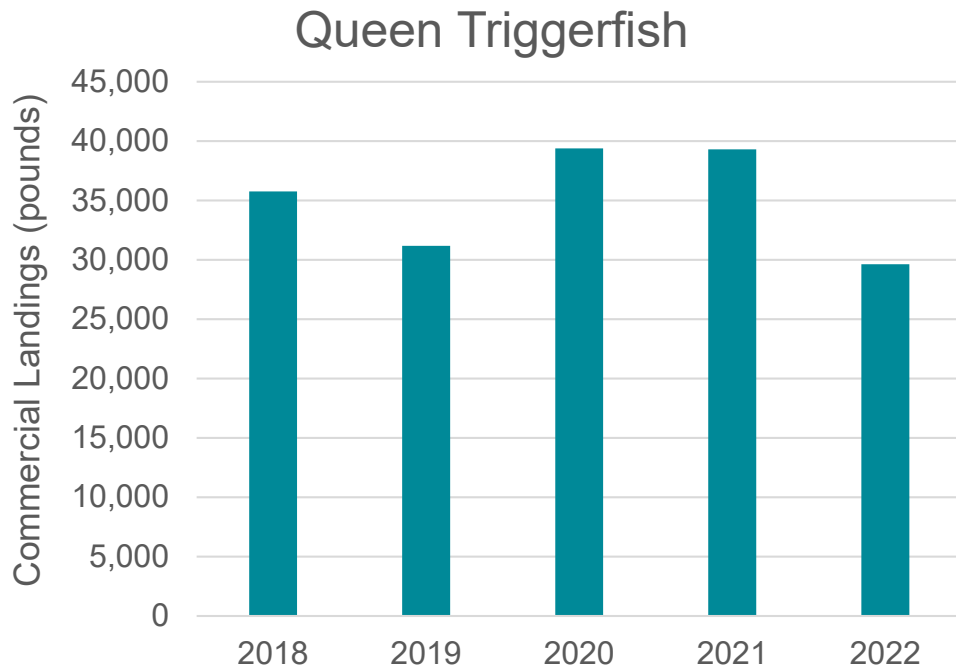
# General Expected Effects – St. Croix

- **Alternative 1:** Not based on best scientific information. No changes to current reference points (current ACL exceeds the ABC recommended by the SSC based on SEDAR 80).
  - Biological/Ecological:** Long-term negative effects from potential lack of sustainability.
  - Social/Ecological:** No additional short-term effects (no changes to current levels), and long-term negative effects from decreased income and fishing opportunities for the species from lack of sustainability.
  - Administrative:** None.
  
- **Alternatives 2 - 4:** Based on best scientific information. Update reference points; decrease in ACL.
  - Biological/Ecological:** Short-term positive effects from decreased removals\*, and long-term positive effects from managing to the maximum sustainable yield. (Alternative 4 is most conservative)
  - Social/Economic:** Short-term negative effects from reduced revenues and fishing opportunities\*\*, but long-term positive effects from sustainably managing the stock. (Alternative 4 is most restrictive)
  - Administrative:** Short-term effects from creating, administering, and enforcing new regulations and from additional outreach efforts notifying stakeholders of changes. (Equal effects among proposed alternatives)

\* If fishermen harvest to the ACL.

\*\* Note current commercial landings for queen triggerfish are well below the current and proposed ACLs.

# Comparison of Alternatives – St. Thomas/St. John



Alternative	ACL	Change
Alt. 1 (no action)	97,670	0
Alt. 2 (0% reduction)	97,809	139
Alt. 3 (5% reduction)	92,919	-4,751
Alt. 4 (10% reduction)	88,028	-9,642

See Table 3.3.6 in Framework Action 3 document for landings of queen triggerfish reported in St. Thomas/St. John.

# General Expected Effects – St. Thomas/St. John

- Alternative 1: Not based on best scientific information. No changes to current reference points.

**Biological/Ecological:** Long-term negative effects from lack of potential sustainability.

**Social/Ecological:** No additional short-term effects (no changes to current levels), and long-term negative effects from decreased income and fishing opportunities for the species from lack of sustainability.

**Administrative:** None.

- Alternative 2: Based on best scientific information. Update reference points; increase in ACL.

**Biological/Ecological:** Short-term negative effects from increased removals\*, and long-term positive effects from managing to the maximum sustainable yield. (Alternative 2 is least conservative)

**Social/Economic:** Short-term positive effects from increased revenues and fishing opportunities\*\*, and long-term positive effects from sustainably managing the stock. (Alternative 2 is least restrictive)

**Administrative:** Short-term effects from creating, administering, and enforcing new regulations and from additional outreach efforts notifying stakeholders of changes.

\* If fishermen harvest to the ACL.

\*\* Note current commercial landings for queen triggerfish are well below the current and proposed ACLs.

# Expected Effects – St. Thomas/St. John Continued

- Alternatives 3 - 4: Based on best scientific information. Update reference points; decrease in ACL.

**Biological/Ecological:** Short-term positive effects from decreased removals\*, and long-term positive effects from managing to the maximum sustainable yield. (Alternative 4 is most conservative)

**Social/Economic:** Short-term negative effects from reduced revenues and fishing opportunities\*\*, but long-term positive effects from sustainably managing the stock. (Alternative 4 is most restrictive)

**Administrative:** Short-term effects from creating, administering, and enforcing new regulations and from additional outreach efforts notifying stakeholders of changes. (Equal effects among proposed alternatives)

\* If fishermen harvest to the ACL.

\*\* Note current commercial landings for queen triggerfish are well below the current and proposed ACLs.

# Action Items and Next Steps



December  
2024

- Council selects a preferred alternative for St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John (can be the same or different).
- If preferred selected, Council could review regulatory text.
- Council could approve Framework Action 3 for submission to Secretary of Commerce (allowing staff to make editorial changes).

Jan.-Feb.  
2025

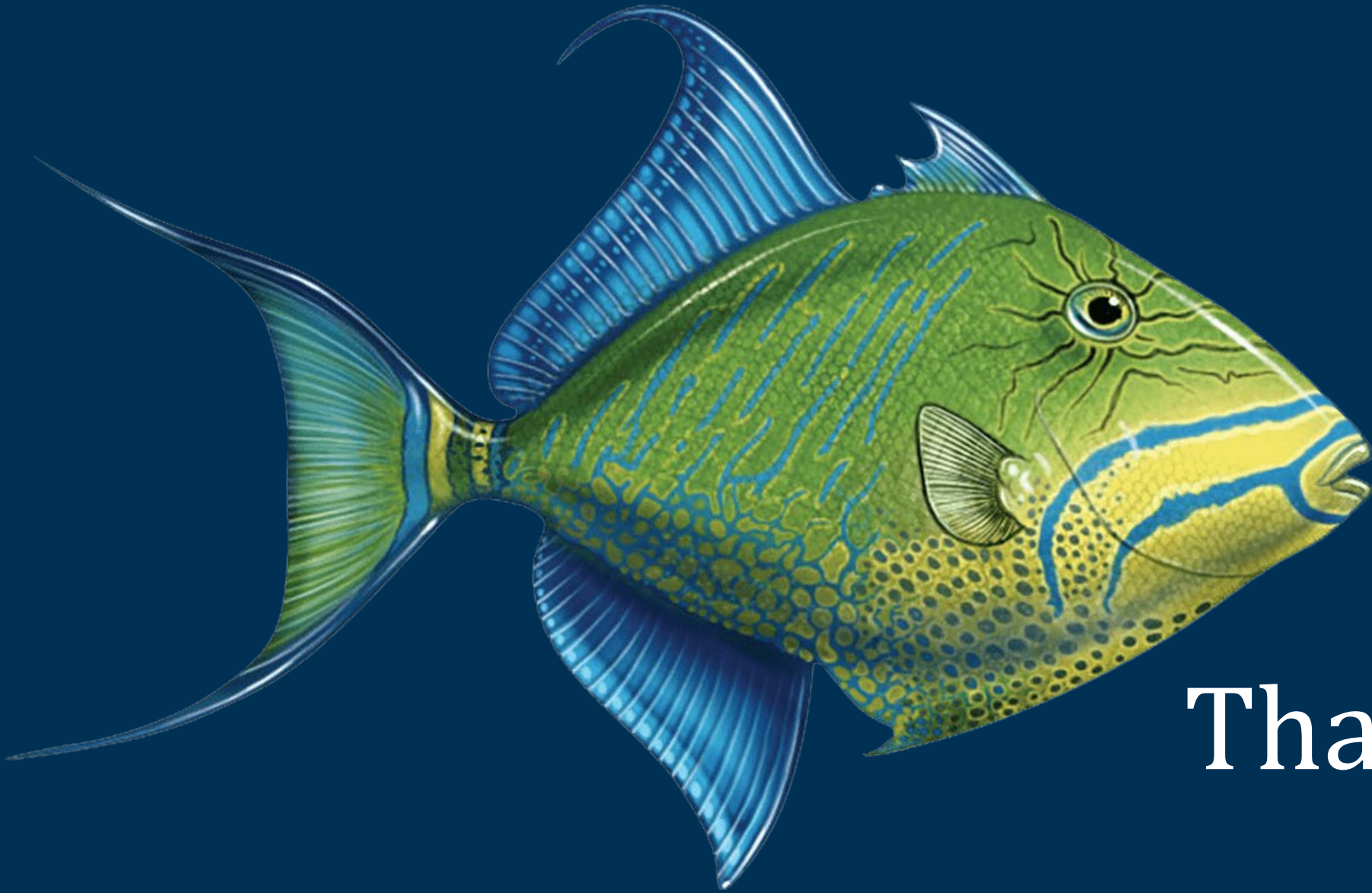
- Staff prepares full Framework Action 3 (USVI); includes environmental assessment table of contents and economic analyses (Chapters 5 and 6).
- Staff submits completed framework to Council Chair to review.
- Council submits Framework Action 3 to NMFS.

March-April  
2025

- SERO staff begins rulemaking.
- Public will have opportunity to comment during the proposed rule comment period, which will be announced in the *Federal Register* and in a Caribbean Fishery Bulletin (text CARIBFISH to 888777).



**NOAA**  
FISHERIES



Thank You



**NOAA**  
FISHERIES