



**NOAA
FISHERIES**



Reclassification of the Rainbow Runner as a Pelagic Species under the Puerto Rico FMP



Maria López-Mercer, NMFS SERO
CFMC 183rd Meeting
St. Thomas, USVI
December 5-6, 2023



Background

- The rainbow runner, or “salmón” (in Spanish), *Elagatis bipinnulata*, is primarily a pelagic fish of the jacks family Carangidae.
- The species is widespread throughout the tropical and subtropical waters of the world, inhabiting both coastal and offshore areas.
- The species often forms schools of variable sizes ranging from a few individuals to several hundred.
- It is an important species for recreational fishing. Typical fishing techniques for this game fish include poppers, trolling, live bait, and jigs.
- It was added as a new species to the Puerto Rico Fishery Management Plan (FMP)(effective in 2022), where it was included under the Reef Fish Component along with other jack species.



Background

- The rainbow runner is managed with annual catch limits (ACL) for each of the commercial and recreational sectors, a reef fish specific accountability measure (AM), and with recreational bag limits applicable to reef fish.
- In addition, regulations applicable to reef fish such as a ban on the use of certain gear types and the prohibition on reef fish harvest and possession in Bajo de Sico during the seasonal closure (Oct 1- Mar 31, each year), apply to this species.



Background



- At the April 2023 Council meeting, the Puerto Rico District Advisory Panel (PRDAP) discussed with the Council an enforcement issue related to harvesting rainbow runner during the Bajo de Sico seasonal closure. Reef fish harvest is prohibited during the seasonal closure.
- The PRDAP advised the Council that the rainbow runner is targeted as a pelagic fish that inhabits the water column, and it is captured either by trolling or with live bait in waters around Puerto Rico.
- The PRDAP recommended the Council reclassify the rainbow runner from a member of the Reef Fish component to a member of the Pelagic Fish component of the PR fisheries.
- Based on the PRDAP recommendation, the Council tasked their Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to evaluate the available information and make a recommendation as to whether reclassifying the rainbow runner as a pelagic species was warranted.
- During their May 2023 meeting, the SSC recommended reclassification of the species to a Pelagic Fish under the Puerto Rico FMP.
- At the August 2023 Council meeting, the Council accepted the SSC's recommendation, and decided to move forward with an amendment to the Puerto Rico FMP to make this change.



Objective



To ensure that the species is managed in accordance to its life history characteristics and fishing patterns, which are consistent with Council-management of pelagic species.

Proposed Option

Reclassify the rainbow runner (*Elagatis bipinnulata*) from the Puerto Rico Reef Fish group to the Puerto Rico Pelagic group through **Framework Amendment 3 to the Puerto Rico FMP**.

Outcomes

- Regulations that apply to reef fish such as the recreational bag limit, a prohibition for the harvest of reef fish species in the Bajo de Sico area, and a reef fish-specific AM would not apply to the species any longer.
- Specific regulations that apply to pelagic species would be applicable to the rainbow runner:

Annual Catch Target based on the current ACL for the species

Pelagic-specific AMs



Proposed Option



From PR FMP: “For pelagic stocks/stock complexes an AM-based season length reduction in the event of an ACL overage would not be applied. Instead, the Council would establish an annual catch target (ACT) as a percentage of the ACL that would serve as the AM trigger.”

Proposed Option: Establishment of an Annual Catch Target for the Rainbow Runner under the Pelagic Species Group.

Establish a commercial and recreational ACT for rainbow runner equal to 90% of the commercial ACL and recreational ACL, respectively.

	Commercial	Recreational	Total
ACL (from PRFMP)	913 lbs	8,091 lbs	9,004 lbs
ACT (after this amendment)	822 lbs	7,282 lbs	8,104 lbs



AM applicable to Pelagic Stocks (from Puerto Rico FMP)



Process for Triggering an AM for the listed Pelagic Stocks/Stock Complexes

An AM would be triggered if the applicable landings (e.g., sector landings, as available) exceed the applicable ACT (e.g., sector ACT) for that stock/stock complex.

Regarding the applicable ACT, where landings data are available to manage by sector, the ACT is the sector ACT, and sector landings are compared to the sector ACT. The AM would be triggered only for the sector(s) that exceeded the ACT. If landings data are not available to manage by sector, the ACT for the sector with available landings is the ACT for the stock/stock complex as a whole, and available sector landings are compared to the ACT for the stock/stock complex as a whole. The AM would apply to all those fishing for the stock/stock complex.

Process for Applying an AM for Pelagic Stocks/Stock Complexes

If an AM is triggered, the Council in consultation with the SEFSC would assess whether corrective action is needed.





Documents to be developed

- Framework Amendment with one action, including description of the fishery, biological, social, economic effects.
- Regulatory Impact Review and Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): Categorical Exclusion (CE) Memo (Activities found not to have individual or cumulative significant impacts on the human environment)

CE A1: An action that is a technical correction or a change to a fishery management action or regulation, which **does not result in a substantial change** in any of the following: fishing location, timing, effort, authorized gear types, or harvest levels.



Action Items and Next Steps

December
2023

- Council reviews draft proposed action and plan for development

April 2024

- IPT develops Framework Amendment 3 to the PR FMP
- Council reviews draft framework amendment and may take final action, pending draft development status

2024

- NMFS develops proposed rule, publishes
- NMFS develops final rule, publishes
- Framework Amendment 3 becomes effective



NOAA
FISHERIES