



**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[RTID 0648-XF588]

**Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic; Request for an Exempted Fishing Permit**

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice of receipt of an application for an exempted fishing permit; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS announces the receipt of an application for an exempted fishing permit (EFP) from Cultimar Technologies, Inc. (Cultimar). If granted by NMFS, the EFP would authorize the applicant to collect 200 sexually mature American red snapper from Federal waters off the Atlantic coast of Florida to establish a dedicated broodstock population at a hatchery research facility in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. The project aims to establish a genetically diverse breeding population to study the biology, physiology, and aquaculture potential of the species, and to develop scalable fingerling production protocols for the aquaculture industry.

**DATES:** Written comments must be received on or before [INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE **FEDERAL REGISTER**].

**ADDRESSES:** You may submit comments on the application,

identified by [NOAA-NMFS-2026-1057] by either of the following methods:

- *Electronic Submission:* Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Visit <https://www.regulations.gov> and type [NOAA-NMFS-2026-1057], in the Search box. Click the "Comment" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.
- *Mail:* Submit written comments to Karla Gore, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

*Instructions:* Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered by NMFS. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on <https://www.regulations.gov> without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments - enter "N/A" in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous.

An electronic copy of the EFP application may be obtained from the Southeast Regional Office website at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/resources->

*fishing/cultimar-exempted-fishing-permit-red-snapper-collection-aquaculture.*

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Karla Gore, 727-824-5305, [karla.gore@noaa.gov](mailto:karla.gore@noaa.gov).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The EFP is requested under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act; 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*), and regulations at 50 CFR 600.745(b) concerning exempted fishing.

The applicants seek to collect 200 sexually mature American red snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*) from South Atlantic Federal waters to establish a self-sustaining broodstock population at their private aquaculture hatchery and research facility in Arecibo, Puerto Rico.

Currently, the expansion of the U.S. marine aquaculture industry for warm-water fish species is limited by a lack of a source for juvenile fish providers. The applicant has conducted academic research previously to establish foundational husbandry for American red snapper and larval rearing protocols. However, inconsistent spawning production remains a barrier to commercial aquaculture of the species. The applicant aims to expand on their previous research by creating a genetically robust population for aquaculture of American red snapper capable of year-round natural spawning. This project is intended to provide the seed stock necessary to support future domestic

grow-out operations, reduce dependency on imported seafood, and generate data on the effects of capture depth and handling on the long-term reproductive performance of this species.

The project aims to advance American red snapper aquaculture through a series of objectives centered on their collection, acclimation, and research. Initially, the applicant will focus on broodstock collection and transport, aiming to capture 200 healthy, sexually mature American red snapper from South Atlantic Federal waters off the east coast of Florida and relocate them by boat to Puerto Rico while maintaining minimal mortality rates. This initial collection of 200 wild red snapper would allow Cultimar to establish 10 distinct breeding cohorts of 20 fish each, thereby providing suitable genetic variability for future breeding, which is intended to then allow for year-round spawning at their aquaculture facility, and significantly reduce the need for future collections of wild American red snapper. The project seeks to determine and establish the long-term viability of red snapper aquaculture by refining the methods necessary for consistent and scalable fingerling production within the aquaculture industry.

Cultimar proposes to collect American red snapper due to its high aquaculture potential and the extensive foundational research already conducted on the species.

This species was chosen over other regional snapper populations because of the applicant's familiarity with its specific spawning behaviors and habitat locations, as well as the higher relative abundance of the American red snapper population versus other snapper species in the Caribbean. While another species of red snapper, the Caribbean red snapper (*Lutjanus purpureus*), is found in the waters around Puerto Rico and throughout areas of the Caribbean, American red snapper represents a distinct population with unique life history characteristics that may make it suitable for aquaculture. Additionally, the applicant has significant experience conducting academic research specifically on American red snapper, including establishing critical protocols for husbandry, nutrition, and larval rearing.

The capture of the project fish would occur from a research vessel chartered by the applicant. The fishing for red snapper would be conducted using spinning and conventional hook-and-line gear with single-hook circle rigs. During red snapper collection, it is anticipated that three to four hooks would be used at any one time with the described fishing gear. To minimize barotrauma and negative effects on fish health, fishing would prioritize harvest at shallow depths. On a collection fishing trip, any bycatch or discards of non-target fish that are landed displaying signs of barotrauma would be vented using hypodermic

needles prior to being released. Following capture, red snapper would initially be transferred to live wells on the research vessel that would be equipped with supplemental oxygenation. After the fish in the live wells are assessed for suitability, they would be transferred to larger holding tanks on the vessel equipped with portable recirculating systems designed to maintain water chemistry and animal health. The vessel would then transit to the applicant's aquaculture hatchery in Puerto Rico. Once at the hatchery facility, the applicant would transfer the collected red snapper to their shore-based aquaculture tanks.

If approved, the applicant expects to be able to collect the 200 adult red snapper in 1 to 2 total fishing trips. Each trip would be expected to last up to approximately 9 days consisting of about 4 days of active fishing and 5 days of vessel transit. The collected adult red snapper are expected to weigh between 5 to 15 pounds (lb) each (2.3 to 6.8 kilograms (kg)).

The applicant expects to fish for red snapper between May 2026 and March 2027, although collection in November 2026 is their preferred time. The area of collection would be in South Atlantic Federal waters off the coast of Cape Canaveral, Florida. The fishing collection effort would focus on hard-bottom areas within a proposed collection polygon defined by the following coordinates:

- 28°51.740' North lat., 80°25.061' West long.
- 28°34.088' North lat., 80°02.000' West long.
- 27°51.955' North lat., 80°11.565' West long.
- 27°41.552' North lat., 79°58.311' West long.

Water depths in the proposed sampling area range from approximately 50 to 200 feet (15.2 to 61.0 meters).

Upon arrival at the applicant's aquaculture facility in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, the red snapper would be transferred to shore-based aquaculture tanks where they would be maintained alive in a controlled, recirculating aquaculture system. These fish would be used exclusively for research on reproductive health and larval production and would not be sold or transferred to any third party. While the facility may eventually distribute or sell juvenile fish produced from these research efforts to other aquaculture facilities, the original fish collected under this EFP would remain at the aquaculture facility for the duration of their life.

The applicant has requested exemptions from several Federal regulations to conduct this project. The applicant has requested an exemption from regulations requiring a commercial vessel permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper (50 CFR 622.170(a)(1)). The exemption would allow the project's contracted research vessel to harvest and possess red snapper in excess of the recreational bag limits without having the snapper-grouper commercial permit. An

exemption from the area and seasonal closure regulations has been requested to allow the collection of red snapper during optimal weather conditions and at any time of the year and not just during the designated red snapper commercial season (50 CFR 622.183(b)(5)). An exemption from the commercial trip limits has been requested to allow for the collection during a trip in excess of the red snapper commercial trip limit of 75 lb (34 kg), gutted weight (50 CFR 622.191(a)(9)). Lastly, the applicant has requested an exemption from the red snapper annual catch limits and accountability measures to ensure they have the flexibility they need to collect fish at various times of the year and not just during the designated red snapper season (50 CFR 622.193(y)(1)). The applicant has not requested, and NMFS does not anticipate the need for, any exemptions from regulations implementing the Puerto Rico Fishery Management Plan as all they intend to do in the Puerto Rico exclusive economic zone is transit in the project vessel from the collection area in the Federal waters off Florida to their land-based aquaculture facility in Puerto Rico.

NMFS finds the application warrants further consideration based on a preliminary review. Possible conditions the agency may impose on the EFP, if granted, include but are not limited to, special protections for Endangered Species Act-listed species and specific reporting requirements.

A final decision on issuance of the EFP will depend on NMFS' review of public comments received on the application, consultations with the appropriate fishery management agencies, and the U.S. Coast Guard, and a determination that the activities are consistent with all other applicable laws.

**Authority:** 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: April 17, 2026.

**Kelly Denit,**

*Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,*

*National Marine Fisheries Service.*

[FR Doc. 2026-07745 Filed: 4/20/2026 8:45 am; Publication Date: 4/21/2026]