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DPNR Sets New 12-Inch Minimum Size Rule for Yellowtail Snapper Across USVI Waters

The rules require all yellowtail snapper harvested in USVI waters to measure at least 12 inches, with undersized fish released immediately, vessel operators responsible for compliance, & possession or sale prohibited as violations may trigger enforcement.

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Yellow Tail Snapper. By. GETTY IMAGES.

The V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources has announced new sustainability measures for yellowtail snapper in the U.S. Virgin Islands, establishing a 12-inch minimum size requirement for all fish harvested in territorial waters around St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John. The rule, which DPNR says aligns local practices with federal regulations, is intended to support

long-term population stability for a species that is both economically and culturally significant to the territory.

The announcement, made in recognition of World Fisheries Day on Thursday, came from Commissioner Jean-Pierre L. Oriol, who highlighted the essential role of fishers in safeguarding marine resources. With guidance from the territorial Fishery Advisory Committees, DPNR is implementing the new management measure in accordance with 50 CFR 622.481 and 50 CFR 622.516.

Under the rule now in effect, all yellowtail snapper (*Ocyurus chrysurus*) caught in territorial waters must measure at least 12 inches in total length. DPNR explained that requiring the fish to reach this size ensures they can reproduce before harvest, helping maintain the species' long-term sustainability.

The department also detailed compliance and enforcement expectations. Fish under 12 inches must be released immediately with minimal harm, and vessel operators are responsible for ensuring adherence to the regulation. The possession, sale, or purchase of undersized yellowtail snapper is prohibited.

According to DPNR, these measures—consistent with Title 12 of the Virgin Islands Code and Title 50 CFR Part 622—create a unified regulatory standard across territorial and federal waters, simplifying compliance for local fishers. Violations may result in enforcement action.

For further information or reporting, DPNR directed the public to the Division of Fish and Wildlife and the Division of Environmental Enforcement. Contact numbers were provided for both St. Croix (340-773-1082) and St. Thomas (340-775-6762).