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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 1206013412-2517-02]

RIN 0648-XF493

**Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic;
2017 Commercial Accountability Measure and Closure for Gulf of
Mexico Greater Amberjack**

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS implements accountability measures (AMs) for
commercial greater amberjack in the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) reef
fish fishery for the 2017 fishing year through this temporary
rule. NMFS projects commercial landings for greater amberjack
will reach the commercial annual catch target (ACT) by June 20,
2017. Therefore, NMFS closes the commercial sector for greater
amberjack in the Gulf on June 20, 2017, and it will remain closed
until the start of the next fishing year on January 1, 2018.
This closure is necessary to protect the Gulf greater amberjack
resource.

DATES: This rule is effective 12:01 a.m., local time, June 20, 2017, until 12:01 a.m., local time, January 1, 2018.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kelli O'Donnell, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, telephone: 727-824-5305, or email: *Kelli.ODonnell@noaa.gov*.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the reef fish fishery of the Gulf, which includes greater amberjack, under the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf (FMP). The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) prepared the FMP and NMFS implements the FMP under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) by regulations at 50 CFR part 622. All greater amberjack weights discussed in this temporary rule are in round weight.

The commercial annual catch limit (ACL) for Gulf greater amberjack is 464,400 lb (210,648 kg), as specified in 50 CFR 622.41(a)(1)(iii). The commercial quota (equivalent to the commercial ACT) is 394,740 lb (179,051 kg), as specified in 50 CFR 622.39(a)(1)(v).

Under 50 CFR 622.41(a)(1)(i), NMFS is required to close the commercial sector for greater amberjack when the commercial ACT is reached, or is projected to be reached, by filing a

notification to that effect with the Office of the Federal Register. NMFS has determined the commercial ACT will be reached by June 20, 2017. Accordingly, the commercial sector for Gulf greater amberjack is closed effective 12:01 a.m., local time, June 20, 2017, until 12:01 a.m., local time, January 1, 2018.

The operator of a vessel with a valid commercial vessel permit for Gulf reef fish with greater amberjack on board must have landed, bartered, traded, or sold such greater amberjack prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, June 20, 2017. During the commercial closure, the sale or purchase of greater amberjack taken from the EEZ is prohibited. The prohibition on sale or purchase does not apply to the sale or purchase of greater amberjack that were harvested, landed ashore, and sold prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, June 20, 2017, and were held in cold storage by a dealer or processor. The commercial sector for greater amberjack will reopen on January 1, 2018, the beginning of the 2018 greater amberjack commercial fishing season.

During the commercial closure, the bag and possession limits specified in 50 CFR 622.38(b)(1) apply to all harvest or possession of greater amberjack in or from the Gulf exclusive economic zone (EEZ). However, the recreational sector for greater amberjack closed on March 24, 2017, until the start of

the next fishing year on January 1, 2018 (82 FR 14477, March 21, 2017). During this recreational closure, the bag and possession limits for greater amberjack in or from the Gulf EEZ are zero.

Classification

The Regional Administrator, Southeast Region, NMFS, has determined this temporary rule is necessary for the conservation and management of Gulf greater amberjack and is consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable laws.

This action is taken under 50 CFR 622.41(a)(1) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

These measures are exempt from the procedures of the Regulatory Flexibility Act, because the temporary rule is issued without opportunity for prior notice and comment.

This action responds to the best scientific information available. The Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries (AA), finds that the need to immediately implement this action to close the commercial sector for greater amberjack constitutes good cause to waive the requirements to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth in 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), as such procedures would be

unnecessary and contrary to the public interest. Such procedures are unnecessary because the rule establishing the closure provisions was subject to notice and comment, and all that remains is to notify the public of the closure. Such procedures are contrary to the public interest because of the need to immediately implement this action to protect the greater amberjack stock. The capacity of the commercial sector allows for rapid harvest of the commercial quota, and prior notice and opportunity for public comment would require time and would potentially result in harvest exceeding the commercial ACL.

For the aforementioned reasons, the AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effectiveness of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d) (3).

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

Dated: June 14, 2017.

Margo B. Schulze-Haugen,
Acting Deputy Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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