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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 140501394-5279-02]

RIN 0648-XF525

**Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic;
2017 Commercial Accountability Measures and Closure for
Blueline Tilefish in the South Atlantic Region**

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 blueline tilefish in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the South Atlantic. Commercial landings for blueline tilefish are projected to reach the commercial annual catch limit (ACL) by July 18, 2017. Therefore, NMFS is closing the commercial sector for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic EEZ at 12:01 a.m., local time, July 18, 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 blueline tilefish resource.

DATES: This rule is effective at 12:01 a.m., local time, July 18, 2017, until 12:01 a.m., local time, January 1, 2018.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Nikhil Mehta, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, telephone: 727-824-5305, email: *nikhil.mehta@noaa.gov*.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The snapper-grouper fishery of the South Atlantic includes blueline tilefish and is managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (FMP). The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and NMFS prepared the FMP, and the FMP is implemented under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) by regulations at 50 CFR part 622.

As specified at 50 CFR 622.193(z)(1)(i), the blueline tilefish commercial ACL is 87,521 lb (39,699 kg), round weight.

The blueline tilefish commercial AM requires NMFS to close the commercial sector for blueline tilefish when the commercial ACL is reached, or is projected to be reached, by filing a notification to that effect with the Office of the Federal Register, as specified in 50 CFR 622.193(z)(1)(i). NMFS has projected that the commercial ACL for South Atlantic blueline tilefish will be reached by July 18, 2017. Accordingly, the

commercial sector for South Atlantic blueline tilefish is closed effective at 12:01 a.m., local time, July 18, 2017, until 12:01 a.m., local time, January 1, 2018.

The operator of a vessel with a valid Federal commercial vessel permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper having blueline tilefish on board must have landed and bartered, traded, or sold such blueline tilefish prior to July 18, 2017. During the commercial closure, all sale or purchase of blueline tilefish is prohibited. The harvest or possession of blueline tilefish in or from the South Atlantic EEZ is limited to the bag and possession limits specified in 50 CFR 622.187(b)(2) and 622.187(c)(1), respectively, while the recreational sector for blueline tilefish is open. These bag and possession limits apply in the South Atlantic on board a vessel with a valid Federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper, and apply to the harvest of blueline tilefish in both state and Federal waters.

Classification

The Regional Administrator for the NMFS Southeast Region has determined this temporary rule is necessary for the conservation and management of blueline tilefish and the South Atlantic snapper-grouper fishery and is consistent with the

Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable laws.

This action is taken under 50 CFR 622.193(z)(1)(i) 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 blueline tilefish 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 prior notice and opportunity for public comment are unnecessary and contrary to the public interest. Such procedures are unnecessary because the regulations at 50 CFR 622.193(z)(1)(i) have already been subject to notice and comment, and all that remains is to notify the public of the closure. Prior notice and opportunity for public comment are contrary to the public interest because there is a need to immediately implement this action to protect blueline tilefish, since the capacity of the fishing fleet allows for rapid harvest of the commercial ACL. Prior notice

and opportunity for public comment would require time and would potentially result in a harvest well in excess of the established 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: July 5, 2017.

Emily H. Menashes,
Acting Director,
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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