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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 121004518-3398-01; RTID 0648-XS023]

**Reef Fish Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico; 2020 Recreational
Accountability Measure and Closure for Gulf of Mexico Gray
Triggerfish**

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS implements an accountability measure (AM) for the gray triggerfish recreational sector in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) for the 2020 fishing year through this temporary rule. NMFS has projected that the 2020 recreational annual catch target (ACT) for Gulf gray triggerfish will be reached by May 2, 2020. Therefore, NMFS closes the recreational sector for Gulf gray triggerfish on May 2, 2020, and it will remain closed through the end of the fishing year on December 31, 2020. This closure is necessary to protect the Gulf gray triggerfish resource.

DATES: This temporary rule is effective from 12:01 a.m., local

time, on May 2, 2020, until 12:01 a.m., local time, on January 1, 2021.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Daniel Luers, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, telephone: 727-551-5719, email:

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

The recreational annual catch limit (ACL) for Gulf gray triggerfish is 241,200 lb (109,406 kg), and the recreational ACT is 217,100 lb (98,475 kg) (50 CFR 622.41(b)(2)(iii)).

As specified in 50 CFR 622.41(b)(2)(i), NMFS is required to close the recreational sector for gray triggerfish when the recreational 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 2020 recreational ACT

for Gulf gray triggerfish will be reached by May 2, 2020.

Accordingly, this temporary rule closes the recreational sector for Gulf gray triggerfish effective at 12:01 a.m., local time, on May 2, 2020, and it will remain closed through the end of the fishing year on December 31, 2020.

During the recreational closure, the bag and possession limits for gray triggerfish in or from the Gulf EEZ are zero. The prohibition on possession of Gulf gray triggerfish also applies in Gulf state waters for any vessel issued a valid Federal charter vessel/headboat permit for Gulf reef fish.

Additionally, as specified in 50 CFR 622.34(f), there is a seasonal closure for Gulf gray triggerfish at the beginning of each fishing year from January 1 through the end of February. Therefore, after the closure implemented by this temporary rule becomes effective on May 2, 2020, the recreational harvest or possession of Gulf gray triggerfish will be prohibited until March 1, 2021.

Classification

The Regional Administrator for the NMFS Southeast Region has determined this temporary rule is necessary for the conservation and management of Gulf gray triggerfish and is consistent with the FMP, the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and other

applicable laws.

This action is taken under 50 CFR 622.41(b)(2)(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 implement this action to close the recreational sector for gray triggerfish constitutes good cause to waive the requirements to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment on this temporary rule pursuant to the authority set forth in 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), because such procedures are 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 implement this action to protect gray triggerfish and to provide advance notice to the recreational sector. Many for-hire operations book trips for clients in advance and need as much advance notice as NMFS is able to provide to adjust their

business plans to account for the closure.

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

Dated: February 19, 2020.

Karyl K. Brewster-Geisz,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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