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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 121004515-3608-02; RTID 0648-XA427]

Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic; 2020 Commercial Closure for South Atlantic Red Snapper

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS implements an accountability measure for red snapper in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the South Atlantic. NMFS projects commercial landings of red snapper have reached the commercial annual catch limit (ACL) for the 2020 fishing year. Therefore, NMFS is closing the commercial sector for red snapper in the South Atlantic EEZ on September 5, 2020. This closure is necessary to protect the red snapper resource.

DATES: This temporary rule is effective from 12:01 a.m., eastern time, on September 5, 2020, through December 31, 2020.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Frank Helies, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, telephone: 727-824-5305, email:

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

The commercial ACL for red snapper in the South Atlantic is 124,815 lb (56,615 kg), round weight, as specified in 50 CFR 622.193(y)(1).

Under 50 CFR 622.193(y)(1), NMFS is required to close the commercial sector for red snapper 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. NMFS has determined that the commercial ACL for South Atlantic red snapper will be reached by September 5, 2020. Accordingly, the commercial sector for South Atlantic red snapper is closed effective at 12:01 a.m., eastern time, on September 5, 2020. For the 2021 fishing year, unless otherwise specified, the commercial season will begin on the second Monday in July (50 CFR 622.183(b)(5)(i)).

The operator of a vessel with a valid commercial vessel permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper having red snapper on board must have landed and bartered, traded, or sold such red snapper prior to 12:01 a.m., eastern time, on September 5, 2020. Because the recreational sector closed on July 18, 2020 (85 FR 36165, June 15, 2020), after the commercial sector closure that is effective on September 5, 2020, all harvest and possession of red snapper in or from the South Atlantic EEZ is prohibited for the remainder of the 2020 fishing year.

On and after the effective date of the closure notification, all sale or purchase of red snapper is prohibited. This prohibition on the harvest, possession, sale or purchase apply in the South Atlantic on a vessel for which a valid Federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper has been issued, regardless if such species were harvested or possessed in state or Federal waters (50 CFR 622.193(y)(1) and 622.181(c)(2)).

Classification

NMFS issues this action pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This action is required by 50 CFR 622.193(y)(1), which was issued pursuant to section 304(b) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, 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 red snapper 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 are unnecessary and contrary to the public interest. Such procedures are unnecessary because the rule that established the commercial season, ACL, and accountability measure for red snapper has already been 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 red snapper because 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 could 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: August 31, 2020.

Kelly Denit,

Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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