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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 120404257-3325-02]

RIN 0648-XE489

**Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic;
2016 Commercial Accountability Measure and Closure for South
Atlantic Golden Tilefish Longline Component**

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS implements an accountability measure for the commercial longline component for golden tilefish in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the South Atlantic. Commercial longline landings for golden tilefish are projected to reach the longline component's commercial annual catch limit (ACL) on March 15, 2016. Therefore, NMFS closes the commercial longline component for golden tilefish in the South Atlantic EEZ on March 15, 2016, and it will remain closed until the start of the next fishing year, January 1, 2017. This closure is necessary to protect the golden tilefish resource.

DATES: This rule is effective 12:01 a.m., local time, March 15, 2016, until 12:01 a.m., local time, January 1, 2017.

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

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The snapper-grouper fishery of the South Atlantic includes golden tilefish 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.

On April 23, 2013, NMFS published a final rule to implement Amendment 18B to the FMP (78 FR 23858). Amendment 18B to the FMP established a longline endorsement program for the commercial golden tilefish component of the snapper-grouper fishery and allocated the commercial golden tilefish ACL (equivalent to the commercial quota) between two gear groups, the longline and hook-and-line components as commercial quotas.

The commercial quota for the longline component for golden tilefish in the South Atlantic is 405,971 lb (184,145 kg),

gutted weight, for the current fishing year, January 1 through December 31, 2016, as specified in 50 CFR 622.190(a)(2)(iii).

Under 50 CFR 622.193(a)(1)(ii), NMFS is required to close the commercial longline component for golden tilefish when the longline component's commercial quota has been reached, or is projected to be reached, by filing a notification to that effect with the Office of the Federal Register. After the commercial quota for the longline component is reached or projected to be reached, golden tilefish may not be fished for or possessed by a vessel with a golden tilefish longline endorsement. NMFS has determined that the commercial quota for the longline component for golden tilefish in the South Atlantic will be reached on March 15, 2016. Accordingly, the commercial longline component for South Atlantic golden tilefish is closed effective 12:01 a.m., local time, March 15, 2016, until 12:01 a.m., local time, January 1, 2017.

During the commercial longline closure, golden tilefish may still be harvested commercially using hook-and-line gear. However, a vessel with a golden tilefish longline endorsement is not eligible to fish for or possess golden tilefish using hook-and-line gear under the hook-and-line trip limit, as specified in 50 CFR 622.191(a)(2)(ii). The operator of a vessel

with a valid commercial vessel permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper and a valid commercial longline endorsement for golden tilefish having golden tilefish on board must have landed and bartered, traded, or sold such golden tilefish prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, March 15, 2016. During the commercial longline closure, the bag limit and possession limits specified in 50 CFR 622.187(b)(2)(iii) and (c)(1), respectively, apply to all harvest or possession of golden tilefish in or from the South Atlantic EEZ by a vessel with a golden tilefish longline endorsement. The sale or purchase of longline-caught golden tilefish taken from the EEZ is prohibited during the commercial longline closure. The prohibition on sale or purchase does not apply to the sale or purchase of longline-caught golden tilefish that were harvested, landed ashore, and sold prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, March 15, 2016, and were held in cold storage by a dealer or processor. Additionally, the bag and possession limits and the sale and purchase provisions of the commercial closure apply to a person on board a vessel with a golden tilefish longline endorsement, regardless of whether the golden tilefish are harvested in state or Federal waters, as specified in 50 CFR 622.190(c)(1).

Classification

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

This action is taken under 50 CFR 622.193(a)(1)(ii) 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 Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds that the need to immediately implement this action to close the commercial longline component for golden 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 procedures for this temporary rule would be unnecessary and contrary to the public interest. Such procedures are unnecessary, because the regulations at 50 CFR 622.193(a)(1)(ii) 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 on this action are contrary to the public interest, because there is a need to immediately implement this action to protect the golden tilefish resource since the capacity of the fishing fleet allows for rapid harvest of the commercial quota for the longline component. Prior notice and opportunity for public comment would require time and would potentially result in a harvest well in excess of the established commercial quota for the longline component.

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: March 8, 2016

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