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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 1206013412-2517-02]

RIN 0648-XF166

**Reef Fish Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico; 2017 Recreational
Accountability Measures and Closure for Gulf of Mexico Greater
Amberjack**

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; recreational quota reduction and closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS implements accountability measures (AMs) for the greater amberjack recreational sector in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) for the 2017 fishing year through this temporary rule. NMFS has determined that the 2016 recreational annual catch limit (ACL) for Gulf greater amberjack was exceeded; therefore, NMFS reduces the greater amberjack recreational ACL and annual catch target (ACT) in 2017. NMFS has also determined that the reduced recreational ACT for Gulf greater amberjack will be reached by March 24, 2017. Therefore, the greater amberjack recreational season in the

Gulf EEZ will close on March 24, 2017. This closure is necessary to protect the Gulf greater amberjack resource.

DATES: This rule is effective from 12:01 a.m., local time, March 24, 2017, until 12:01 a.m., local time, on January 1, 2018.

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

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the Gulf reef fish fishery, 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 2017 recreational ACL for Gulf greater amberjack specified in 50 CFR 622.41(a)(2)(iii) is 1,255,600 lb (569,531 kg) and the recreational ACT specified in 50 CFR 622.39(a)(2)(ii) is 1,092,372 lb (495,492 kg). However, NMFS has determined that in 2016, the recreational harvest of greater amberjack exceeded the 2016 recreational ACL by 756,631 lb (343,202 kg). Under 50 CFR 622.41(a)(2)(ii), NMFS is required

to reduce the recreational ACT and the recreational ACL for greater amberjack in the year following an overage of the recreational ACL, by the amount of any recreational overage in the prior fishing year. Therefore, NMFS reduces the recreational ACL for greater amberjack in 2017 to 498,969 lb (226,329 kg) and the recreational ACT to 335,741 lb (152,290 kg).

Under 50 CFR 622.41(a)(2)(i), NMFS is required to close the recreational sector for greater amberjack 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 2017 recreational ACT will be reached by March 24, 2017. Accordingly, NMFS is closing recreational harvest of greater amberjack for the rest of the 2017 fishing year effective at 12:01 a.m., local time, March 24, 2017, until 12:01 a.m., local time, January 1, 2018, the start of the next fishing year.

During the recreational closure, the bag and possession limits for greater amberjack in or from the Gulf EEZ are zero. The prohibition on possession in the Gulf on board a vessel for which a valid Federal charter vessel/headboat permit for Gulf reef fish has been issued applies regardless of whether greater amberjack were harvested in state or Federal waters.

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)(2)(i) and (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 NOAA Fisheries (AA) finds that the need to immediately implement this action to close the recreational sector for greater amberjack 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 immediately implement this action to protect greater amberjack. Prior notice and opportunity for public comment would require time and would potentially allow the recreational sector to exceed the recreational 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: March 17, 2017.

Jennifer M. Wallace,
Acting Director,
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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