

from the States opposing the prohibition of shallow sets east of the 150° W. long. and no objection has been raised by the Council. NMFS intends to continue engaging in informal and formal contacts with these States during the implementation of this final rule and amendments to the FMP.

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 223

Endangered and threatened species, Exports, Imports, Marine mammals, Transportation.

Dated: March 5, 2004.

Rebecca Lent,

Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, National Marine Fisheries Service.

■ For the reasons set out in the preamble, 50 CFR part 223 is amended to read as follows:

PART 223—THREATENED MARINE AND ANADROMOUS SPECIES

■ 1. The authority citation for part 223 is revised to read as follows:

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1531–1543; subpart B, § 223.12 also issued under 16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*; 16 U.S.C. 5503(d) for § 223.206(d)(9).

■ 2. In § 223.206, a new paragraph (d)(9) is added to read as follows:

§ 223.206 Exceptions to prohibitions relating to sea turtles.

* * * * *

(d) * * *

(9) *Restrictions applicable to Pacific pelagic longline vessels.* In addition to the general prohibitions specified in § 600.725 of Chapter VI, it is unlawful for any person who is not operating under a western Pacific longline permit under § 660.21 to do any of the following on the high seas of the Pacific Ocean east of 150° W. long. and north of the equator (0° N. lat.):

(i) Direct fishing effort toward the harvest of swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) using longline gear.

(ii) Possess a light stick on board a longline vessel. A light stick as used in this paragraph is any type of light emitting device, including any fluorescent *glow bead*, chemical, or electrically powered light that is affixed underwater to the longline gear.

(iii) An operator of a longline vessel subject to this section may land or possess no more than 10 swordfish from a fishing trip where any part of the trip included fishing east of 150° W. long. and north of the equator (0° N. lat.).

(iv) Fail to employ basket-style longline gear such that the mainline is deployed slack when fishing.

(v) When a conventional monofilament longline is deployed by a vessel, no fewer than 15 branch lines

may be set between any two floats. Vessel operators using basket-style longline gear must set a minimum of 10 branch lines between any 2 floats.

(vi) Longline gear must be deployed such that the deepest point of the main longline between any two floats, i.e., the deepest point in each sag of the main line, is at a depth greater than 100 m (328.1 ft or 54.6 fm) below the sea surface.

[FR Doc. 04–5553 Filed 3–10–04; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 031125292–4061–02; I.D. 030504A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Vessels Catching Pacific Cod for Processing by the Offshore Component in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska

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

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the A season allocation of the 2004 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component of the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 8, 2004, through 1200 hrs, A.l.t., June 10, 2004.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 907–586–7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The A season allocation of the 2004 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Western Regulatory Area is 1,017 metric tons (mt) as established by the 2004 final harvest specifications of groundfish for the GOA (69 FR 9261, February 27, 2004).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the A season allocation of the 2004 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component of the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA will be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 817 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 200 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator finds that this directed fishing allowance will soon be reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent the Agency from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the closure of the A season allocation of the 2004 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component of the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30–day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by section 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: March 5, 2004.

Bruce C. Morehead,

*Acting Director, Office of Sustainable
Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.*

[FR Doc. 04-5408 Filed 3-5-04; 3:07 pm]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S