

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, 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 contrary to the public interest. This requirement is contrary to the public interest as it would delay the opening of the fishery, not allow the full utilization of the B season allowance of the pollock TAC, and therefore reduce the public's ability to use and enjoy the fishery resource.

The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, 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 § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: March 17, 2003.

Richard W. Surdi,

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

[FR Doc. 03-6840 Filed 3-18-03; 3:52 pm]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 679**

[Docket No. 021122286-3036-02; I.D. 031703D]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone off Alaska; Pollock in Statistical Area 630 of the Gulf of Alaska

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

ACTION: Inseason adjustment; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS issues an inseason adjustment opening the B fishing season for pollock in Statistical Area 630 of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) for 12 hours effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 20, 2003, until 2400 hrs, A.l.t., March 20, 2003. This adjustment is necessary to allow the fishing industry opportunity to harvest the B

season allowance of the pollock total allowable catch (TAC) in Statistical Area 630 of the GOA.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, A.l.t., March 20, 2003, until 2400 hrs, A.l.t., March 20, 2003. Comments must be received no later than 4:30 p.m., A.l.t., April 2, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Comments may be mailed to Sue Salvesson, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668, Attn: Lori Durall. Comments also may be sent via facsimile (fax) to 907-586-7557. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or Internet. Courier or hand delivery of comments may be made to NMFS in the Federal Building, Room 453, Juneau, AK 99801.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mary Furuness, 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.

NMFS issued a prohibition to directed fishing for pollock effective March 10, 2003, for Statistical Area 630, in accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii) (68 FR 11994, March 13, 2003).

As of March 11, 2003, 857 metric tons (mt) of pollock remain in the B season allowance of the pollock TAC in Statistical Area 630 of the GOA. Regulations at § 679.23(b) specify that the time of all openings and closures of fishing seasons other than the beginning and end of the calendar fishing year is 1200 hrs, A.l.t. Current information shows the catching capacity of vessels catching pollock for processing by the inshore component in Statistical Area 630 of the GOA is about 1,500 mt per day. The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined that the B season allowance of the pollock TAC could be exceeded if a 24-hour fishery were allowed to occur. NMFS is not allowing a 24-hour directed fishery in order that the seasonal allowance not be exceeded. NMFS, in accordance with § 679.25(a)(1)(i) and § 679.25(a)(2)(i), is adjusting the B fishing season for pollock in Statistical Area 630 of the GOA by opening the fishery at 1200 hrs, A.l.t., March 20, 2003 and closing the fishery at 2400 hrs, A.l.t., March 20, 2003, at which time directed fishing for

pollock will be prohibited. This action has the effect of opening the fishery for 12 hours.

NMFS is taking this action to allow a controlled fishery to occur, thereby preventing the overharvest of the B season allowance of the pollock TAC designated in accordance with the final 2003 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA (68 FR 9924, March 3, 2003) and § 679.20(a)(5)(iii). In accordance with § 679.25(a)(2)(iii), NMFS has determined that prohibiting directed fishing at 2400 hrs, A.l.t., March 20, 2003, after a 12-hour opening is the least restrictive management adjustment to achieve the B season allowance of the pollock TAC. Pursuant to § 679.25(b)(2), NMFS has considered data regarding catch per unit of effort and rate of harvest in making this adjustment.

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The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, 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.

Without this inseason adjustment, NMFS could not allow the B season allowance of the pollock TAC in Statistical Area 630 of the GOA to be harvested in an expedient manner and in accordance with the regulatory schedule. Under § 679.25(c)(2), interested persons are invited to submit written comments on this action to see **ADDRESSES** until April 2, 2003.

This action is required by §§ 679.20 and 679.25 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: March 17, 2003.

Richard W. Surdi,

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

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