

king crab PSC limit specified for the RKCSS will be caught. Consequently, NMFS is closing the RKCSS to directed fishing for groundfish with non-pelagic trawl gear.

#### 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 closure of the fishery, lead to exceeding the interim 2003 red king crab PSC limit, 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 § 679.21 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: February 14, 2003.

**Richard W. Surdi,**

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

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

#### 50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 021212306-2306-01; I.D. 021403C]

#### Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Vessels Catching Pacific Cod for Processing by the Inshore 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 inshore component in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the interim 2003 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component of the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

**DATES:** Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), February 17, 2003, until superseded by the notice of Final 2003 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the GOA, which will be published in the **Federal Register**.

**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.

The interim 2003 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA is 7,979 metric tons (mt) as established by the interim 2003 harvest specifications of groundfish for the GOA (67 FR 78733, December 26, 2002).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the interim 2003 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component of the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA will be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 7,929 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 50 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 inshore component in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

Maximum retainable bycatch amounts may be found in the regulations at § 679.20(e) and (f).

#### 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 closure of the fishery, lead to exceeding the interim 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:** 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: February 14, 2003.

**Richard W. Surdi,**

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

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