

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

[Docket No. 031124287-4060-02; I.D. 032404E]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Catcher/Processor Vessels Using Trawl Gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

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

ACTION: Modification of a closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is reopening directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher/processor vessels using trawl gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to utilize the remaining amount of the A season allocation of the 2004 Pacific cod total allowable catch (TAC) specified for catcher/processor vessels using trawl gear.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 28, 2004, through 1200 hrs, A.l.t., April 1, 2004.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mary Furuness, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area (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 2004 final harvest specifications for groundfish of the BSAI (69 FR 9242, February 27, 2004), established the Pacific cod TAC allocated to catcher/processor vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI for the period 1200 hrs, A.l.t., January 1, 2004, through 1200 hrs, A.l.t., April 1, 2004, as 23,422 metric tons. See § 679.20(c)(3)(iii), § 679.20(c)(5), and § 679.20(a)(7)(i)(A) and (C). In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the directed fishery for Pacific cod by catcher/processor vessels using trawl gear was closed effective 1200 hrs, A.l.t., March 14, 2004 (69 FR 12569, March 17, 2004) because it was determined that the A season allocation of the 2004 Pacific cod TAC specified for catcher/

processor vessels using trawl gear had been caught.

NMFS has determined that as of March 20, 2004, the remaining amount of the A season allocation of the 2004 Pacific cod TAC for catcher/processor vessels using trawl gear is 2,000 metric tons. Therefore, NMFS is terminating the previous closure and is reopening directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher/processor vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI effective 1200 hrs, A.l.t., March 28, 2004.

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 reopening of the fishery for the remaining A season allocation of Pacific cod TAC specified for catcher/processor vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI.

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 § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: March 26, 2004.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

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

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Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Atka mackerel in the Central Aleutian District of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the A season allowance of the 2004 total allowable catch (TAC) of Atka mackerel specified for the Central Aleutian District.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 26, 2004, until 1200 hrs, A.l.t., September 1, 2004.

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

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area (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 2004 final harvest specification for groundfish of the BSAI (69 FR 9242, February 27, 2004), allocated an Atka mackerel A season allowance in the Central Aleutian District of the BSAI of 14,384 metric tons (mt).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the A season allowance of the 2004 TAC specified for Atka mackerel in the Central Aleutian District will be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 14,084 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 300 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 be reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Atka mackerel in the Central Aleutian District of the BSAI.

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

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AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and