

randomly assigned each vessel to the directed fishery or fisheries for which they have registered. NMFS notified each vessel owner as to which fishery each vessel has been assigned (69 FR 2849, January 21, 2004).

In accordance with § 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(1) and as established by the Interim 2004 Harvest Specifications for Groundfish (68 FR 68,265, December 8, 2003), the HLA limit of the interim TAC in area 543 is 5,097 metric tons (mt). Based on this limit and the proportion of the number of vessels in each fishery compared to the total number of vessels participating in the HLA directed fishery for area 543, the harvest limit for the first HLA directed fishery in area 543 is 2,549 mt. In accordance with § 679.20(a)(8)(iii)(E), the Regional Administrator is rescinding the February 2, 2004, closure announced previously for this fishery (69 FR 2850, January 21, 2004), and is establishing a revised time and date for the closure of the first directed fishery for Atka Mackerel within the HLA in Statistical Area 543 of the BSAI as 12 noon, A.l.t., January 30, 2004, based on the amount of the harvest limit and the estimated fishing capacity of the vessels assigned to the fisheries.

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, would delay the closure of the fishery under the interim 2004 Atka mackerel HLA limit established for area 543 of the BSAI and would prevent the Agency from ensuring that the 2004 Atka mackerel HLA limit established for area 543 not be exceeded.

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: January 30, 2004.

Bruce C. Morehead,

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. 031126297-3297-01; I.D. 013004A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific cod by Vessels Catching Pacific cod for Processing by the Inshore Component in the Central 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 Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the interim 2004 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component of the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), January 31, 2004, until superseded by the notice of Final 2004 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the GOA, which will be published in the **Federal Register**.

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 interim 2004 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component in the Central Regulatory Area is 10,916 metric tons (mt) as

established by the interim 2004 harvest specifications of groundfish for the GOA (68 FR 67964, December 5, 2003).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the interim 2004 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component of the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA will be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 9,016 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 1,900 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 Central 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 fishery under the interim 2004 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component of the Central 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 § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: January 30, 2004.

Bruce C. Morehead,

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