

Dated: July 2, 2003.

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. 021212307 3037-02; I.D. 070203B]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Ocean Perch in the Eastern Aleutian District of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

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

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific ocean perch in the Eastern Aleutian District of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the 2003 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific ocean perch in this area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), July 5, 2003, through 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2003.

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 2003 TAC of Pacific ocean perch for the Eastern Aleutian District was established as 3,238 metric tons (mt) by the final 2003 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (68 FR 9907, March 3, 2003).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the 2003 TAC for Pacific ocean perch in the Eastern Aleutian District will be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is

establishing a directed fishing allowance of 2,938 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 soon be reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific ocean perch in the Eastern 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 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 2003 TAC for Pacific ocean perch in the Eastern Aleutian District, and therefore reduce the public's ability to use and enjoy the fishery resource.

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.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 030128023-3158-02; I.D. 011503D]

RIN 0648-AQ44

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Increase in Roe Retention Limit for Pollock Harvested in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

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

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: This final rule increases from 7 to 9 percent the percentage of pollock roe that may be retained by operators of catcher/processors and motherships processing pollock harvested in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area. This action is necessary because catcher/processors and motherships have been able to increase their pollock roe recovery rate since the passage of the American Fisheries Act (AFA) through cooperative fishing practices and more precise timing of fishing activity. This action is intended to be consistent with the environmental and socioeconomic objectives of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Management and Conservation Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) and other applicable laws.

DATES: Effective August 8, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the Categorical Exclusion and Regulatory Impact Review prepared for this action may be obtained from Lori Durall, NMFS, Alaska Region, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802, 907-586-7247

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jay Ginter, 907-586-7228, or jay.ginter@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the exclusive economic zone of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (BSAI) under the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area (FMP). The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) prepared, and NMFS approved, the FMP under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. 1801, *et seq.*). Regulations implementing the FMP appear at 50 CFR part 679. General regulations governing U.S. fisheries also appear at 50 CFR part 600.

Background

NMFS published a proposed rule to raise the maximum retainable percentage of pollock roe from 7 to 9 percent on February 11, 2003 (68 FR 6865), with comments invited through March 13, 2003. Two letters of comment were received by the end of the comment period and are responded to in the response to comments section. Additional background on the development of roe stripping regulations and the purpose and need for this action are contained in the preamble to the proposed rule.

This final rule raises the maximum retainable percentage of pollock roe