

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

[Docket No. 021122286-3036-02; I.D. 080103B]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Shortraker/Rougheye Rockfish 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 retention of shortraker/rougheye rockfish in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). NMFS is requiring that catch of shortraker/rougheye rockfish in this area be treated in the same manner as prohibited species and discarded at sea with a minimum of injury. This action is necessary because the allocation of the shortraker/rougheye rockfish 2003 total allowable catch (TAC) in this area has been achieved.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), August 6, 2003, until 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2003.

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 the Groundfish Fishery 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 allocation of the shortraker/rougheye rockfish TAC in the Central Regulatory Area was established as 840 metric tons by the final 2003 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA (68 FR 9924, March 3, 2003).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(2), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined that the allocation of the shortraker/rougheye rockfish TAC in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA has been reached. Therefore, NMFS is requiring that further catches of shortraker/rougheye rockfish in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA be treated as prohibited species in accordance with § 679.21(b).

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 prohibition of retention, lead to exceeding the TAC of shortraker/rougheye rockfish in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA, 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.*

Dated: August 5, 2003.

Bruce C. Morehead,

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