

their holdings above the current limit to the new limit. Because blocked QS are limited by block and vessel category restrictions, unblocked QS units are more likely to be transferred. The unblocked halibut QS units in regulatory areas 4A through 4D equal approximately 2.1 million lb (952 metric tons) of halibut worth more than \$4.6 million in exvessel value. Therefore, this proposed action would have a significant positive impact on a substantial number of small businesses. It would significantly improve the profitability of operations for fishermen wishing to harvest IFQ halibut in remote areas of the western BSAI.

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 679

Alaska fisheries, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

Dated: November 25, 1996.

Gary Matlock,

Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

For the reasons set out in the preamble, 50 CFR Part 679 is proposed to be amended as follows:

PART 679—FISHERIES IN THE EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE OFF ALASKA

1. The authority citation for 50 CFR Part 679 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 773 *et seq.*, 1801 *et seq.*

2. In § 679.42, paragraphs (f)(1) through (f)(3) are revised to read as follows:

§ 679.42 Limitations on use of QS and IFQ.

* * * * *

(f) * * *

(1) IFQ regulatory area 2C. 599,799 units of halibut QS.

(2) IFQ regulatory areas 2C, 3A, and 3B. 3,005,646 units of halibut QS.

(3) IFQ regulatory areas 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E. 495,044 units of halibut QS.

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50 CFR Part 679

[I.D. 112596C]

RIN 0648-AI62

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area; Prohibited Species Catch Limits for Tanner Crab

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

ACTION: Notice of availability of an amendment to the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) has submitted Amendment 41 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area (FMP) for Secretarial review. Amendment 41 would adjust the prohibited species catch (PSC) limits for Tanner crab (*Chionoecetes bairdi*) (*C. bairdi*) in Zones 1 and 2 of the Bering Sea. This action is necessary to protect the *C. bairdi* stock in the Bering Sea, which has declined to a level that presents a serious conservation problem. The intended effect of the proposed action is to further limit crab bycatch in the Bering Sea groundfish fisheries.

DATES: Comments on the FMP amendment must be received by January 31, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Comments on the proposed FMP amendment must be submitted to Ronald J. Berg, Chief, Fisheries

Management Division, Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK, 99802-1668, Attn: Lori Gravel, or delivered to the Federal Building, 709 West 9th Street, Juneau, AK. Copies of proposed Amendment 41 and the Environmental Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis are available from the Council, 605 West Fourth Ave., Anchorage, AK 99501-2252; telephone 907-271-2809.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kim S. Rivera, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires that each Regional Fishery Management Council submit any fishery management plan or plan amendment it prepares to NMFS for review and approval, disapproval, or partial approval. The Magnuson-Stevens Act also requires that NMFS, upon receiving a plan or amendment, immediately publish a document that the plan or amendment is available for public review and comment.

Amendment 41 would adjust the PSC limits for Tanner crab (*C. bairdi*) in Zones 1 and 2 of the Bering Sea based on the total abundance of *C. bairdi* crab as indicated by the NMFS bottom trawl survey. The PSC limits would be determined on an annual basis as part of the annual BSAI groundfish specification process, after consultation with the Council.

NMFS will consider the public comments received during the comment period in determining whether to approve the proposed amendment.

Dated: November 26, 1996.

Gary Matlock,

Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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