

In accordance with § 679.20(c)(3)(iii), the first seasonal allowance of pollock for vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the BS was established by the Final 1997 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish. The Final 1997 Specifications were published in the Federal Register on February 18, 1997 (62 FR 7168).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the first allowance of pollock TAC for vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the BS soon will be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 278,736 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 27,000 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 pollock by vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the BS. This closure is effective from February 20, 1997, through 1200 hrs, A.l.t., April 15, 1997. Under § 679.20(a)(5)(i), the second seasonal allowance of pollock TAC will become available for directed fishing at 1200 hrs, A.l.t., September 1. Maximum retainable bycatch amounts for applicable gear types may be found in the regulations at § 679.20(e) and (f).

#### Classification

This action is required by § 679.20, and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: February 19, 1997.  
Gary Matlock  
*Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,  
National Marine Fisheries Service.*  
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#### 50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 961107312-7021-02; I.D. 021997C]

#### Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Species in the Rock Sole/Flathead Sole/"Other Flatfish" Fishery Category by Vessels Using Trawl Gear in Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

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

**ACTION:** Closure.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS is closing directed fishing for species in the rock sole/flathead sole/"other flatfish" fishery category by vessels using trawl gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the first seasonal apportionment of the 1997 Pacific halibut bycatch allowance of halibut specified for the trawl rock sole/flathead sole/"other flatfish" fishery category.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), February 20, 1997, until 1200 hrs, A.l.t., April 1, 1997.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Andrew Smoker, 907-586-7228.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The groundfish fishery in the BSAI exclusive economic zone is managed by NMFS 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. Fishing by U.S. vessels is governed by regulations implementing the FMP at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The first seasonal apportionment of the prohibited species bycatch mortality allowance of halibut for the BSAI trawl rock sole/flathead sole/"other flatfish" fishery category, which is defined at § 679.21(e)(3)(iv)(B)(2), was established by the Final 1997 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish (62 FR 7168, February 18, 1997) as 485 mt.

In accordance with § 679.21(e)(7)(iv), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the first seasonal apportionment of the 1997 halibut bycatch allowance specified for the trawl rock sole/flathead sole/"other flatfish" fishery in the BSAI has been caught. Consequently, NMFS is closing directed fishing for species in the rock sole/flathead sole/"other flatfish" fishery category by vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI.

Maximum retainable bycatch amounts may be found in the regulations at § 679.20(e).

#### Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR 679.21 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: February 19, 1997.

Gary Matlock

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

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