

Dated: February 20, 1998.

Jamie Rappaport Clark,
Director, Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dated: February 24, 1998.

David L. Evans,
*Deputy Assistant Administrator for Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 971208296-7296-01; I.D. 022098B]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Offshore Component of Pollock in the Aleutian Islands Subarea

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

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for pollock by vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the Aleutian Islands subarea (AI) of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the proposed first seasonal allowance of pollock apportioned to vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the AI of the BSAI.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), February 23, 1998, until 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
Mary Furuness, 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. processors is governed by regulations implementing the FMP at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

In accordance with § 679.20(c)(2)(ii), the proposed first seasonal allowance of pollock apportioned to vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the AI of the BSAI was established as 15,470 metric tons (mt) by the Interim 1998 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the BSAI (62 FR 65626, December 15, 1997).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the proposed first seasonal allowance of pollock apportioned to vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the AI of the BSAI soon will be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 13,470 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 2,000 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 AI of the BSAI.

Maximum retainable bycatch amounts for applicable gear types may be found in the regulations at § 679.20(e) and (f).

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. It must be implemented immediately in order to prevent overharvesting the proposed first seasonal allowance of pollock apportioned to vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the AI of the BSAI. A delay in the effective date is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. The fleet has already taken the proposed first seasonal allowance of pollock apportioned to vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the AI of the BSAI. Further delay would only result in overharvest which would disrupt the FMP's objective of providing sufficient pollock as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. NMFS finds for good cause that the implementation of this action can not be delayed for 30 days. Accordingly, under 5 U.S.C. 553(d), a delay in the effective date is hereby waived.

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

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

Gary C. Matlock,

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

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