

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 971208296-7296-01; I.D. 030498D]

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 interim 1998 Pacific halibut bycatch allowance of halibut specified for the trawl rock sole/flathead sole/"other flatfish" fishery category.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 5, 1998, until 1200 hrs, A.l.t., March 30, 1998.

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 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 Interim 1998 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish (62 FR 65626, December 15, 1997) as 199 mt.

In accordance with § 679.21(e)(8)(v), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the interim 1998 halibut bycatch allowance specified for the trawl rock sole/flathead sole/"other flatfish" fishery in the BSAI has been caught. Consequently, the Regional Administrator 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) and (f).

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. It must be implemented immediately to prevent exceeding the interim 1998 Pacific halibut bycatch allowance of halibut specified for the trawl rock sole/flathead sole/"other flatfish" fishery category. Providing prior notice and an opportunity for public comment on this action is impracticable and contrary to public interest. The fleet will soon take the apportionment. Further delay would only result in the interim 1998 Pacific halibut bycatch allowance of halibut being exceeded and disrupt the FMP's objective of limiting trawl Pacific halibut mortality. NMFS finds for good cause that the implementation of this action cannot be delayed for 30 days. Accordingly, under U.S.C.553(d), a delay in the effective date is hereby waived.

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: March 4, 1998.

Gary C. Matlock,

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

[I.D. 030298A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Sablefish Managed under the IFQ Program

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

ACTION: Fishing season dates.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces the opening of directed fishing for sablefish with fixed gear managed under the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program. The season will open on 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 15, 1998, and will close 1200 hrs, A.l.t., November 15, 1998. This period runs

concurrently with the IFQ season for Pacific halibut announced by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC). The IFQ halibut season will be announced by publication in the **Federal Register**.

DATES: Effective March 15, 1998, 1200 hrs, A.l.t., until 1200 hrs, A.l.t., November 15, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: John Lepore, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Beginning in 1995, fishing for Pacific halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*) and sablefish (*Anoplopoma fimbria*) with fixed gear in the IFQ regulatory areas defined in § 679.2 has been managed under the IFQ Program. The IFQ Program is a regulatory regime designed to promote the conservation and management of these fisheries and to further the objectives of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the Northern Pacific Halibut Act. Persons holding quota share receive an annual allocation of IFQ. Persons receiving an annual allocation of IFQ are authorized to harvest IFQ species within specified limitations. Further information on the implementation of the IFQ Program, and the rationale supporting it, are contained in the preamble to the final rule implementing the IFQ Program published in the **Federal Register**, November 9, 1993 (58 FR 59375), and subsequent amendments.

This announcement is consistent with § 679.23(g)(1), which requires that directed fishing for sablefish managed under the IFQ program be specified by the Administrator, Alaska Region, and announced by publication in the **Federal Register**. This method of season announcement was selected to facilitate coordination between the sablefish season, chosen by the Administrator, Alaska Region, and the halibut season, chosen by the IPHC. The directed fishing season for sablefish with fixed gear managed under the IFQ program will open at 1200 hrs, A.l.t., March 15, 1998, and will close 1200 hrs, A.l.t., November 15, 1998. This period runs concurrently with the IFQ season for Pacific halibut announced by the IPHC. The IFQ halibut season will be announced by publication in the **Federal Register**.

Classification

This action is taken under § 679.23(g)(1) and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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