

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

[Docket No. 000211040-0040-01; I.D. 032100B]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Trawling in Steller Sea Lion Critical Habitat in the Western Aleutian District of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

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

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting trawling within Steller sea lion critical habitat in the Western Aleutian District of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary because the 2000 critical habitat percentage of Atka mackerel allocated to the Western Aleutian District has been reached.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 22, 2000, until the directed fishery for Atka mackerel

closes within the Western Aleutian District.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mary Furuness, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI exclusive economic zone 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. 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 2000 TAC for Atka mackerel specified for the Western Aleutian District during the 'A' season is 13,736 metric tons (mt), of which no more than 7,829 mt may be harvested from critical habitat (65 FR 8282, February 18, 2000). See § 679.20(c)(3)(iii)(A) and 679.22(a)(8)(iii)(B).

In accordance with § 679.22(a)(8)(iii)(A), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the allowable harvest of Atka mackerel in Steller Sea lion critical habitat in the Western Aleutian District as specified

under the 2000 harvest specifications for the 'A' season has been reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting trawling in critical habitat, as defined at 50 CFR part 226, Table 1 and Table 2 in the Western Aleutian District of the BSAI.

Classification

This action responds to the TAC limitations for Atka mackerel in the BSAI. It must be implemented immediately to avoid jeopardy to the continued existence of Steller sea lions. A delay in the effective date is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. NMFS finds for good cause that the implementation of this action should 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.*

Dated: March 22, 2000.

George H. Darcy,

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

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