

Dated: March 10, 2004.

Craig Manson,

Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 031124287-4060-02; I.D. 031104A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Catcher/Processor Vessels Using Hook-and-line Gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

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

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher/processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the A season apportionment of the 2004 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod allocated for catcher/processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in this area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 13, 2004, until 1200 hrs, A.l.t., August 15, 2004.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI 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 2004 Pacific cod TAC, specified in the 2004 final harvest specifications for groundfish of the BSAI (69 FR 9242, February 27, 2004), allocated to catcher/processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in the BSAI, a directed Pacific cod fishing allowance of 48,558 metric tons for the period 1200 hrs, A.l.t., January 1, 2004, through 1200 hrs, A.l.t., June

10, 2004. See § 679.20(c)(3)(iii), § 679.20(c)(5), and § 679.20(a)(7)(i)(A) and (C).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined that the A season apportionment of the 2004 Pacific cod TAC allocated as a directed fishing allowance to catcher/processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in the BSAI will soon be reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher/processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in the BSAI.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent the Agency from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the closure of Pacific cod specified for catcher/processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in the BSAI.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: March 11, 2004.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

Acting 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

[Docket No. 031124287-4060-02; I.D. 031204B]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Catcher/Processor Vessels Using Trawl Gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

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

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher/processor vessels using trawl gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the A season allocation of the 2004 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod specified for catcher/processor vessels using trawl gear in this area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 14, 2004, until 1200 hrs, A.l.t., April 1, 2004.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Mary Furuness, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI 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 2004 final harvest specifications for groundfish of the BSAI (69 FR 9242, February 27, 2004), established the Pacific cod TAC allocated to catcher/processor vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI for the period 1200 hrs, A.l.t., January 1, 2004, through 1200 hrs, A.l.t., April 1, 2004 as 23,422 metric tons (mt). See § 679.20(c)(3)(iii), § 679.20(c)(5), and § 679.20(a)(7)(i)(A) and (C).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined that the A season allocation of the 2004 Pacific cod TAC specified for catcher/processor vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI will soon be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed