

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 622**

[Docket No. 141107936–5399–02]

RIN 0648–XE526

Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic; 2016 Commercial Accountability Measure and Closure for South Atlantic Gray Triggerfish; January Through June Season

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS implements accountability measures for commercial gray triggerfish in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the South Atlantic. NMFS projects commercial landings for gray triggerfish will reach the commercial annual catch limit (ACL) for the January through June period by April 2, 2016. Therefore, NMFS is closing the commercial sector for gray triggerfish in the South Atlantic EEZ on April 2, 2016. This closure is necessary to protect the gray triggerfish resource.

DATES: This rule is effective 12:01 a.m., local time, April 2, 2016, until July 1, 2016.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Britni LaVine, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, telephone: 727–824–5305, email: britni.lavine@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The snapper-grouper fishery of the South Atlantic includes gray triggerfish and is managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (FMP). The FMP was prepared by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and is implemented by NMFS under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) by regulations at 50 CFR part 622.

The final rule implementing FMP Amendment 29 divided the commercial ACL (equal to the commercial quota) for gray triggerfish in the South Atlantic into two 6-month fishing seasons and allocated 50 percent, 156,162 lb (70,834 kg), round weight, of the total commercial ACL of 312,324 lb (141,668 kg), round weight, to each fishing season, January through June, and July

through December (80 FR 30947, June 1, 2015), as specified in 50 CFR 622.190(a)(8)(i) and (ii).

Under 50 CFR 622.193(q)(1)(i), NMFS is required to close the commercial sector for gray triggerfish when either commercial quota specified in § 622.190(a)(8)(i) or (ii) is reached, or is projected to be reached, by filing a notification to that effect with the Office of the Federal Register. NMFS has determined that the commercial quota for South Atlantic gray triggerfish for the January through June fishing season will be reached by April 2, 2016. Accordingly, the commercial sector for South Atlantic gray triggerfish is closed effective at 12:01 a.m., local time, April 2, 2016, until the start of the July through December fishing season on July 1, 2016.

The operator of a vessel with a valid Federal commercial vessel permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper having gray triggerfish on board must have landed and bartered, traded, or sold such gray triggerfish prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, April 2, 2016. During the closure, the bag limit specified in 50 CFR 622.187(b)(8), and the possession limits specified in 50 CFR 622.187(c), apply to all harvest or possession of gray triggerfish in or from the South Atlantic EEZ. Also, during the closure, the sale or purchase of gray triggerfish taken from the South Atlantic EEZ is prohibited. The prohibition on the sale or purchase does not apply to gray triggerfish that were harvested, landed ashore, and sold prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, April 2, 2016, and were held in cold storage by a dealer or processor.

For a person on board a vessel for which a valid Federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for the South Atlantic snapper-grouper fishery has been issued, the bag and possession limits and sale and purchase provisions of the commercial closure for gray triggerfish apply regardless of whether the fish are harvested in state or Federal waters, as specified in 50 CFR 622.190(c)(1)(ii).

Classification

The Regional Administrator, NMFS Southeast Region, has determined this temporary rule is necessary for the conservation and management of gray triggerfish and the South Atlantic snapper-grouper fishery and is consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable laws.

This action is taken under 50 CFR 622.193(q)(1)(i) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

These measures are exempt from the procedures of the Regulatory Flexibility Act because the temporary rule is issued

without opportunity for prior notice and comment.

This action responds to the best scientific information available. The Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries (AA), finds that the need to immediately implement this action to close the commercial sector for gray triggerfish constitutes good cause to waive the requirements to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth in 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), as such procedures are unnecessary and contrary to the public interest. Such procedures are unnecessary because the rule implementing FMP Amendment 29, which established the split commercial season for gray triggerfish, and the rule that established the closure provisions have already been subject to notice and comment, and all that remains is to notify the public of the closure. Such procedures are contrary to the public interest because of the need to immediately implement this action to protect gray triggerfish since the capacity of the fishing fleet allows for rapid harvest of the commercial quota. Prior notice and opportunity for public comment would require time and would potentially result in a harvest well in excess of the established commercial quota.

For the aforementioned reasons, the AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effectiveness of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3).

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

Dated: March 23, 2016.

Emily H. Menashes,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2016–06957 Filed 3–23–16; 4:15 pm]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 660**

[Docket No. 140904754–5188–02]

RIN 0648–BF92

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; Fisheries off West Coast States; Biennial Specifications and Management Measures; Inseason Adjustments

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

ACTION: Final rule; inseason adjustments to biennial groundfish management measures.

SUMMARY: This final rule announces an inseason change to management measures in the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery. This action, which is authorized by the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (PCFMP) and the Northern Pacific Halibut Act, implements changes to the incidental retention allowance for halibut in the limited entry fixed gear sablefish primary fishery.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours (local time) March 25, 2016.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Sarah Williams (West Coast Region, NMFS), phone: 206-526-4646, sarah.williams@noaa.gov

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Electronic Access

This final rule is accessible via the Internet at the Office of the Federal Register Web site at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/home.action>. Background information and documents are available at the Pacific Fishery Management Council's Web site at <http://www.pcouncil.org/>.

Background

The PCGFMP and its implementing regulations at title 50 in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), part 660, subparts C through G, regulate fishing for over 90 species of groundfish off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California. Groundfish specifications and management measures are developed by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), and are implemented by NMFS.

The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) establishes total allowable catch (TAC) amounts for Pacific halibut each year in January. Under the authority of the Northern Pacific Halibut Act, and implementing regulations at 50 CFR 300.63, a Catch Sharing Plan for IPHC Area 2A (waters off the U.S. West Coast), developed by the Council and implemented by the Secretary, allocates portions of the annual TAC among fisheries off Washington, Oregon, and California.

Pacific halibut is generally a prohibited species for vessels fishing in Pacific coast groundfish fisheries, unless explicitly allowed in groundfish regulations and authorized by the Pacific halibut Catch Sharing Plan.

In years where the Pacific halibut TAC is above 900,000 lb (408.2 mt), the Catch Sharing Plan allows the limited entry fixed gear sablefish primary fishery an incidental total catch

allowance for Pacific halibut north of Pt. Chehalis, WA (46°53.30' N. lat.). The 2016 Pacific halibut Area 2A TAC is 1,140,000 lb (517.1 mt). Consistent with the provisions of the Catch Sharing Plan, the limited entry fixed gear sablefish primary fishery is allowed an incidental total catch limit of 49,686 lb (22.54 mt) for 2016.

At its March 2016 meeting, the Council considered the new 2016 total allowable catch (TAC) for Pacific halibut in Area 2A (waters off the U.S. West coast), and the total catch of Pacific halibut in the limited entry fixed gear sablefish primary fishery in recent years. Because the 2016 allocation of halibut to the sablefish primary fishery is similar to landings in 2007 and 2008, the Council recommended a landing restriction similar to the one approved in those years of 110 lbs of halibut for every 1,000 lbs of sablefish and up to two additional halibut in excess of the ratio. NMFS notes that, given the increased allocation in 2016, liberalizing the incidental catch restrictions is anticipated to allow total catch of Pacific halibut to approach, but not exceed, the 2016 allocation for the sablefish primary fishery.

In order to allow incidental halibut catch in the sablefish primary fishery to begin on April 1, the Council recommended and NMFS is implementing incidental halibut retention regulations at 50 CFR 660.231(b)(3)(iv) to allow the catch ratio of "110 lb (50 kg) dressed weight of halibut for every 1,000 pounds (454 kg) dressed weight of sablefish landed and up to 2 additional halibut in excess of the 110-pounds-per-1,000-pound ratio per landing" to be in effect "From April 1 through October 31."

The retention limits for halibut were not revised as part of the 2015–2016 harvest specifications and management measures because the Pacific halibut TAC is developed each year based on the most current scientific information, and the TAC for 2016 was not determined until the IPHC meeting in January, 2016.

Classification

This final rule makes routine inseason adjustments to groundfish fishery management measures, based on the best available information, consistent with the PCGFMP and its implementing regulations. The adjustment to the halibut incidental catch restrictions in the limited entry fixed gear sablefish primary fishery is taken under the authority of the Magnuson Stevens Act, based on actions taken under the Northern Pacific Halibut Act and implementing regulations, and is

consistent with the approved Catch Sharing Plan.

This action is taken under the authority of 50 CFR 660.60(c) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

The aggregate data upon which these actions are based are available for public inspection at the Office of the Administrator, West Coast Region, NMFS, during business hours.

For the following reasons, NMFS finds good cause to waive prior public notice and comment on the revisions to groundfish management measures under 5 U.S.C. 553(b) because notice and comment would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest. Also, for the same reasons, NMFS finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in effectiveness pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3), so that this final rule may become effective March 25, 2016.

As described above, this inseason action is based on information that became available very recently. The changes to the incidental halibut retention in the sablefish primary fishery north of Pt. Chehalis, WA (46°53.30' N. lat.), and the subsequent proposed management measure changes are based in part on decisions made by the IPHC at its January 2016 meeting. At that meeting, the IPHC determined the 2016 halibut TAC based on the most current scientific information regarding the status of the halibut stock. Based on this action, the Council made its final recommendations at its March 9–14, 2016 meeting. The Council considered the public comments on this matter and recommended that these changes be implemented by April 1, 2016. There was not sufficient time after that meeting to complete notice and comment rulemaking before these changes need to be in effect. For the actions to be implemented in this final rule, affording the time necessary for prior notice and opportunity for public comment would prevent NMFS from managing fisheries using the best available science to approach, without exceeding, allocations in accordance with the PCGFMP, the Northern Pacific Halibut Act, and other applicable laws. The adjustments to management measures in this document affect commercial fisheries off Washington State. These adjustments to management measures must be implemented in a timely manner, by April 1, 2016 or as quickly as possible thereafter, to allow incidental catch of halibut in the sablefish primary fishery, reducing regulatory discards, while keeping total catch below the 2016 halibut Area 2A allocation.

No aspect of this action is controversial, and changes of this nature were anticipated in the biennial harvest specifications and management measures established for 2015–2016.

Accordingly, for the reasons stated above, NMFS finds good cause to waive prior notice and comment and to waive the delay in effectiveness.

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 660

Fisheries, Fishing, Indian Fisheries.

Dated: March 23, 2016.

Emily H. Menashes,

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

For the reasons set out in the preamble, 50 CFR part 660 is amended as follows:

PART 660—FISHERIES OFF WEST COAST STATES

■ 1. The authority citation for part 660 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq., 16 U.S.C. 773 et seq., and 16 U.S.C. 7001 et seq.

■ 2. In § 660.231, revise paragraph (b)(3)(iv) to read as follows:

§ 660.231 Limited entry fixed gear sablefish primary fishery.

* * * * *

(b) * * *

(3) * * *

(iv) Incidental halibut retention north of Pt. Chehalis, WA (46°53.30' N. lat.). From April 1 through October 31, vessels authorized to participate in the sablefish primary fishery, licensed by the International Pacific Halibut Commission for commercial fishing in Area 2A (waters off Washington, Oregon, California), and fishing with longline gear north of Pt. Chehalis, WA (46°53.30' N. lat.) may possess and land up to the following cumulative limits: 110 lb (50 kg) dressed weight of halibut for every 1,000 pounds (454 kg) dressed weight of sablefish landed and up to 2 additional halibut in excess of the 110-pounds-per-1,000-pound ratio per landing. "Dressed" halibut in this area means halibut landed eviscerated with their heads on. Halibut taken and retained in the sablefish primary fishery north of Pt. Chehalis may only be landed north of Pt. Chehalis and may not be possessed or landed south of Pt. Chehalis

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 150818742-6210-02]

RIN 0648-XE528

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Inseason Adjustment to the 2016 Gulf of Alaska Pollock Seasonal Apportionments

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; inseason adjustment.

SUMMARY: NMFS is adjusting the 2016 seasonal apportionments of the total allowable catch (TAC) for pollock in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) by re-apportioning unharvested pollock TAC in Statistical Areas 610, 620, and 630 of the GOA. This action is necessary to provide opportunity for harvest of the 2016 pollock TAC, consistent with the goals and objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 23, 2016, until 2400 hours A.l.t., December 31, 2016.

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

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (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 annual pollock TACs in Statistical Areas 610, 620, and 630 of the GOA are apportioned among four seasons, in accordance with § 679.23(d)(2). Regulations at § 679.20(a)(5)(iv)(B) allow the underharvest of a seasonal apportionment to be added to subsequent seasonal apportionments, provided that any revised seasonal apportionment does not exceed 20 percent of the seasonal apportionment for a given statistical area. Therefore, NMFS is increasing the B season apportionment of pollock in Statistical Areas 610, 620, and 630 of the GOA to

reflect the underharvest of pollock in those areas during the A season. In addition, any underharvest remaining beyond 20 percent of the originally specified seasonal apportionment in a particular area may be further apportioned to other statistical areas. Therefore, NMFS also is increasing the B season apportionment of pollock to Statistical Areas 610 and 630 based on the underharvest of pollock in Statistical Areas 620 of the GOA. These adjustments are described below.

The B seasonal apportionment of the 2016 pollock TAC in Statistical Area 610 of the GOA is 3,826 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2016 and 2017 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (81 FR 14740, March 18, 2016). In accordance with § 679.20(a)(5)(iv)(B), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), hereby increases the B season apportionment for Statistical Area 610 by 765 mt to account for the underharvest of the TAC in Statistical Areas 610 and 620 in the A season. This increase is in proportion to the estimated pollock biomass and is not greater than 20 percent of the B seasonal apportionment of the TAC in Statistical Area 610. Therefore, the revised B seasonal apportionment of the pollock TAC in Statistical Area 610 is 4,591 mt (3,826 mt plus 765 mt).

The B seasonal apportionment of the pollock TAC in Statistical Area 620 of the GOA is 50,747 mt as established by the final 2016 and 2017 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (81 FR 14740, March 18, 2016). In accordance with § 679.20(a)(5)(iv)(B), the Regional Administrator hereby increases the B seasonal apportionment for Statistical Area 620 by 10,149 mt to account for the underharvest of the TAC in Statistical Areas 620 in the A season. This increase is not greater than 20 percent of the B seasonal apportionment of the TAC in Statistical Area 620. Therefore, the revised B seasonal apportionment of the pollock TAC in Statistical Area 620 is 60,896 mt (50,747 mt plus 10,149 mt).

The B seasonal apportionment of pollock TAC in Statistical Area 630 of the GOA is 5,083 mt as established by the final 2016 and 2017 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (81 FR 14740, March 18, 2016). In accordance with § 679.20(a)(5)(iv)(B), the Regional Administrator hereby increases the B seasonal apportionment for Statistical Area 630 by 1,016 mt to account for the underharvest of the TAC in Statistical Areas 620 and 630 in the A season. This increase is in proportion to the estimated pollock biomass and is not greater than 20 percent of the B