

Dated: July 8, 2016.

Madhura C. Valverde,

*Executive Secretary to the Department,
Department of Health and Human Services.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 300

[Docket No. 130717632-4285-02]

RIN 0648-XE729

International Fisheries; Pacific Tuna Fisheries; 2016 Bigeye Tuna Longline Fishery Closure in the Eastern Pacific Ocean

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is temporarily closing the U.S. pelagic longline fishery for bigeye tuna for vessels over 24 meters in overall length in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) through December 31, 2016, because the 2016 catch limit of 500 metric tons is expected to be reached. This action is necessary to prevent the fishery from exceeding the applicable catch limit established by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) in Resolution C-13-01 (Multiannual Program for the Conservation of Tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean During 2014-2016).

DATES: The rule is effective 12 a.m. local time July 25, 2016, through 11:59 p.m. local time December 31, 2016.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Taylor Debevec, NMFS West Coast Region, 562-980-4066.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The United States is a member of the IATTC, which was established under the Convention for the Establishment of an Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission signed in 1949 (Convention). The Convention provides an international agreement to ensure the effective international conservation and management of highly migratory species of fish in the IATTC Convention Area. The IATTC Convention Area, as amended by the Antigua Convention, includes the waters of the EPO bounded by the coast of the Americas, the 50° N. and 50° S. parallels, and the 150° W. meridian.

Pelagic longline fishing in the EPO is managed, in part, under the Tuna

Conventions Act as amended (Act), 16 U.S.C. 951-962. Under the Act, NMFS must publish regulations to carry out recommendations of the IATTC that have been approved by the Department of State (DOS). Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the Act appear at 50 CFR part 300, subpart C. These regulations implement IATTC recommendations for the conservation and management of highly migratory fish resources in the EPO.

In 2013, the IATTC adopted Resolution C-13-01, which establishes an annual catch limit of bigeye tuna for longline vessels over 24 meters. For calendar years 2014, 2015, and 2016, the catch of bigeye tuna by longline gear in the IATTC Convention Area by fishing vessels of the United States that are over 24 meters in overall length is limited to 500 metric tons per year. With the approval of the DOS, NMFS implemented this catch limit by notice-and-comment rulemaking under the Act (79 FR 19487, April 9, 2014, and codified at 50 CFR 300.25).

NMFS, through monitoring the retained catches of bigeye tuna using logbook data submitted by vessel captains and other available information from the longline fisheries in the IATTC Convention Area, has determined that the 2016 catch limit is expected to be reached by July 25, 2016. In accordance with 50 CFR 300.25(b), this **Federal Register** notice announces that the U.S. longline fishery for bigeye tuna in the IATTC Convention Area will be closed for vessels over 24 meters in overall length starting on July 25, 2016, through the end of the 2016 calendar year. The 2017 fishing year is scheduled to open on January 1, 2017; the bigeye tuna catch limit for longline vessels over 24 meters in overall length has yet to be determined for 2017. The IATTC will meet in October 2016 and is scheduled to address tropical tuna conservation and management, including the catch limit for large longline vessels. Any measures adopted by the IATTC in October 2016 would subsequently be implemented by NMFS via rulemaking.

During the closure, a U.S. fishing vessel over 24 meters in overall length may not be used to retain on board, transship, or land bigeye tuna captured by longline gear in the IATTC Convention Area, except as follows:

- Any bigeye tuna already on board a fishing vessel on July 25, 2016, may be retained on board, transshipped, and/or landed, to the extent authorized by applicable laws and regulations, provided all bigeye tuna are landed within 14 days after the effective date of this rule, that is, no later than August 8, 2016.

- In the case of a vessel that has declared to NMFS that the current trip type is shallow-set longlining, the 14-day limit to land all bigeye in the previous paragraph is waived. However, the prohibition on any additional retention of bigeye tuna still applies as of July 25, 2016.

Other prohibitions during the closure include the following:

- Bigeye tuna caught by a United States vessel over 24 meters in overall length with longline gear in the IATTC Convention Area may not be transshipped to a fishing vessel unless that fishing vessel is operated in compliance with a valid permit issued under 50 CFR 660.707 or 665.801.¹

- A U.S. fishing vessel over 24 meters in overall length that is not on a declared shallow-set longline trip may not be used to fish in the Pacific Ocean using longline gear both inside and outside the IATTC Convention Area during the same fishing trip, with the exception of a fishing trip that was already in progress when the prohibitions were put into effect.

- If a vessel over 24 meters in overall length not on a declared shallow-set longline trip is used to fish in the Pacific Ocean using longline gear outside the IATTC Convention Area, and the vessel enters the IATTC Convention Area at any time during the same fishing trip, the longline gear on the fishing vessel must be stowed in a manner so as not to be readily available for fishing. Specifically, the hooks, branch lines, and floats must be stowed and not available for immediate use, and any power-operated mainline hauler on deck must be covered in such a manner that it is not readily available for use.

Classification

NMFS has determined there is good cause to waive prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B). This action is based on the best available information and is necessary for the conservation and management of bigeye tuna. Compliance with the notice and comment requirement would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest because NMFS would be unable to ensure that the 2016 bigeye tuna catch limit applicable to longline vessels over 24 meters is not exceeded. The annual catch limit is an important mechanism to ensure that the United States complies with its international obligations in preventing overfishing

¹ In 50 CFR 300.25(b)(4)(ii), the reference to § 665.21 is outdated. The former 50 CFR 665.21 has been recodified to § 665.801.

and managing the fishery at optimum yield. Moreover, NMFS previously solicited, and considered, public comments on the rule that established the catch limit (79 FR 19487, April 9, 2014), including a provision for issuing a notice to close the fishery, if necessary, to prevent exceeding the catch limit. For the same reasons, NMFS has also determined there is good cause to waive the requirement for a 30-day delay in effectiveness under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3).

This action is required by § 300.25(b) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 951 *et seq.*

Dated: July 13, 2016.

Emily H. Menashes,

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

[FR Doc. 2016-16893 Filed 7-13-16; 4:15 pm]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No. 151211999-6343-02]

RIN 0648-XE720

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Northeast Multispecies Fishery; Georges Bank Cod Trimester Total Allowable Catch Area Closure for the Common Pool Fishery

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; area closure.

SUMMARY: This action closes the Georges Bank Cod Trimester Total Allowable Catch Area to Northeast multispecies common pool vessels fishing with trawl gear, sink gillnet gear, and longline/hook gear for the remainder of Trimester 1, through August 31, 2016. The closure is required by regulation because the common pool fishery has caught 90 percent of its Trimester 1 quota for Georges Bank cod. This closure is

intended to prevent an overage of the common pool's quota for this stock. This action is effective July 13, 2016, through August 31, 2016.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Liz Sullivan, Fishery Management Specialist, (978) 282-8493.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Federal regulations at § 648.82(n)(2)(ii) require the Regional Administrator to close a common pool Trimester Total Allowable Catch (TAC) Area for a stock when 90 percent of the Trimester TAC is projected to be caught. The closure applies to all common pool vessels fishing with gear capable of catching that stock for the remainder of the trimester.

As of July 11, 2016, the common pool fishery caught between 79 and 89 percent of the Trimester 1 TAC (3.3 mt) for Georges Bank (GB) cod. We project that 90 percent of the Trimester 1 TAC will be caught within a few days. The fishing year 2016 common pool sub-annual catch limit (sub-ACL) for GB cod is 13.2 mt.

Effective July 13, 2016, the GB Cod Trimester TAC Area is closed for the remainder of Trimester 1, through August 31, 2016, to all common pool vessels fishing with trawl gear, sink gillnet gear, and longline/hook gear. The GB Cod Trimester TAC Area consists of statistical areas 521, 522, 525, and 561. The area reopens at the beginning of Trimester 2 on September 1, 2016.

If a vessel declared its trip through the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) or the interactive voice response system, and crossed the VMS demarcation line prior to July 13, 2016, it may complete its trip within the Trimester TAC Area.

Any overage of the Trimester 1 or 2 TACs must be deducted from the Trimester 3 TAC. If the common pool fishery exceeds its sub-ACL for the 2016 fishing year, the overage must be deducted from the common pool's sub-ACL for fishing year 2017. Any uncaught portion of the Trimester 1 and Trimester 2 TACs is carried over into the next trimester. However, any uncaught portion of the common pool's sub-ACL may not be carried over into the following fishing year.

Weekly quota monitoring reports for the common pool fishery are on our

Web site at: <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/ro/fso/MultiMonReports.htm>. We will continue to monitor common pool catch through vessel trip reports, dealer-reported landings, VMS catch reports, and other available information, and, if necessary, we will make additional adjustments to common pool management measures.

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR part 648 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, finds good cause pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) and 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3) to waive prior notice and the opportunity for public comment and the 30-day delayed effectiveness period because it would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest.

Regulations require the Regional Administrator to close a trimester TAC area to the common pool fishery when 90 percent of the Trimester TAC for a stock has been caught. Updated catch information only recently became available indicating that the common pool fishery will catch 90 percent of its Trimester 1 TAC for GB cod in the week of July 11, 2016. The time necessary to provide for prior notice and comment, and a 30-day delay in effectiveness, prevents the immediate closure of the GB Cod Trimester 1 TAC Area. Delaying the effective date of a closure increases the likelihood that the common pool fishery will exceed its quota of GB cod to the detriment of this stock, which could undermine management objectives of the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. Additionally, an overage of the common pool quota could cause negative economic impacts to the common pool fishery as a result of overage paybacks in a future trimester or fishing year.

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

Dated: July 13, 2016.

Emily H. Menashes,

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

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