

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 635**

[Docket No. 180117042–8884–02]

RIN 0648–XG599

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species; Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Fisheries

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; General category October–November fishery for 2018; fishery reopening.

SUMMARY: NMFS has determined that a reopening of the Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) General category fishery is warranted. This action is intended to provide a reasonable opportunity to harvest the full annual U.S. BFT quota without exceeding it, while maintaining an equitable distribution of fishing opportunities across time periods; help achieve optimum yield in the BFT fishery; and optimize the ability of all permit categories to harvest their full BFT quota allocations. This action applies to Atlantic tunas General category (commercial) permitted vessels and Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Charter/Headboat category permitted vessels with a commercial sale endorsement when fishing commercially for BFT.

DATES: Effective 12:30 a.m., local time, October 31, 2018, through 11:30 p.m., local time, November 2, 2018.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Uriah Forest-Bulley, 978–675–2154, or Sarah McLaughlin, 978–281–9260.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Regulations implemented under the authority of the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (ATCA; 16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.*) and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act; 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*) governing the harvest of BFT by persons and vessels subject to U.S. jurisdiction are found at 50 CFR part 635. Section 635.27 subdivides the U.S. BFT quota recommended by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and as implemented by the United States among the various domestic fishing categories, per the allocations established in the 2006 Consolidated Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan (2006 Consolidated HMS FMP) (71 FR 58058, October 2, 2006), as amended by Amendment 7 to

the 2006 Consolidated HMS FMP (Amendment 7) (79 FR 71510, December 2, 2014). NMFS is required under ATCA and the Magnuson-Stevens Act to provide U.S. fishing vessels with a reasonable opportunity to harvest the ICCAT-recommended quota.

NMFS recently published a final rule (*i.e.*, the “quota rule” (83 FR 51391, October 11, 2018)) that increased the baseline U.S. BFT quota from 1,058.79 mt to 1,247.86 mt and accordingly increased the subquotas for 2018, including an increase in the General category October through November period subquota from 60.7 mt to 70.2 mt, consistent with the annual BFT quota calculation process. On October 4, 2018, NMFS transferred 55 mt to the General category and closed the General category fishery effective October 5, 2018, based on projections that landings would meet or exceed the adjusted October through November subquota of 127.2 mt by that date (83 FR 50857, October 10, 2018). After determining that 45.4 mt remained available, NMFS reopened the General category fishery for two days, October 15 and 16, 2018 (83 FR 52169, October 16, 2018).

General Category Reopening

As of October 26, 2018, reports show that the General category landed 101.6 mt before closing. This represents 80 percent of the adjusted October through November subquota of 127.2 mt. Based on early October landings rates, NMFS has determined that reopening the General category fishery for three days is appropriate given the amount of unused October through November subquota (*i.e.*, 25.6 mt).

Therefore, the General category fishery will reopen at 12:30 a.m., October 31, 2018, and close at 11:30 p.m., November 2, 2018. The General category daily retention limit during this reopening remains the same as prior to closing: One large medium or giant BFT per vessel per day/trip. This action applies to those vessels permitted in the General category, as well as to those HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessels with a commercial sale endorsement when fishing commercially for BFT. Retaining, possessing, or landing large medium or giant BFT by persons aboard vessels permitted in the General and HMS Charter/Headboat categories must cease at 11:30 p.m. local time on November 2, 2018.

The General category will reopen automatically on December 1, 2018, for the December 2018 subquota period at the default one-fish level. In December 2017, NMFS adjusted the General category base subquota for the December

2018 period to 10 mt (82 FR 60680, December 22, 2017), although this amount increased to 14.6 mt with finalization of the quota rule. Based on quota availability in the Reserve, NMFS may consider transferring additional quota to the December subquota period, as appropriate.

Fishermen may catch and release (or tag and release) BFT of all sizes, subject to the requirements of the catch-and-release and tag-and-release programs at § 635.26. All BFT that are released must be handled in a manner that will maximize their survival, and without removing the fish from the water, consistent with requirements at § 635.21(a)(1). For additional information on safe handling, see the “Careful Catch and Release” brochure available at www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/.

Monitoring and Reporting

NMFS will continue to monitor the BFT fishery closely. Dealers are required to submit landing reports within 24 hours of a dealer receiving BFT. Late reporting by dealers compromises NMFS’ ability to timely implement actions such as quota and retention limit adjustment, as well as closures, and may result in enforcement actions. Additionally, and separate from the dealer reporting requirement, General and HMS Charter/Headboat category vessel owners are required to report the catch of all BFT retained or discarded dead within 24 hours of the landing(s) or end of each trip, by accessing hmspermits.noaa.gov, using the HMS Catch Reporting app, or calling (888) 872–8862 (Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.).

Depending on the level of fishing effort and catch rates of BFT, NMFS may determine that additional adjustments are necessary to ensure available subquotas are not exceeded or to enhance scientific data collection from, and fishing opportunities in, all geographic areas. If needed, subsequent adjustments will be published in the **Federal Register**. In addition, fishermen may call the Atlantic Tunas Information Line at (978) 281–9260, or access hmspermits.noaa.gov, for updates on quota monitoring and inseason adjustments.

Classification

The Assistant Administrator for NMFS (AA) finds that it is impracticable and contrary to the public interest to provide prior notice of, and an opportunity for public comment on, this action for the following reasons:

The regulations implementing the 2006 Consolidated HMS FMP and

amendments provide for inseason actions to respond to the unpredictable nature of BFT availability on the fishing grounds, the migratory nature of this species, and the regional variations in the BFT fishery. Affording prior notice and opportunity for public comment to implement the fishery reopening is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. The General category recently closed, but based on available BFT quotas, recent fishery performance, and the availability of BFT on the fishing grounds, responsive reopening of the fishery is warranted to allow fishermen to take advantage of availability of fish and of quota. NMFS could not have proposed this action earlier, as it needed to consider and respond to updated data and information about fishery conditions and this year's landings. If NMFS was to offer a public comment period now, after having appropriately considered that data, it would preclude fishermen from harvesting BFT that are legally available. Therefore, the AA finds good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) to waive prior notice and the opportunity for public comment. For all of the above reasons, there also is good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(d) to waive the 30-day delay in effectiveness.

This action is being taken under § 635.27(a)(1), and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.* and 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: October 30, 2018.

Karen H. Abrams

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. 170817779-8161-02]

RIN 0648-XG572

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Several Groundfish Species in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; apportionment of reserves; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS apportions amounts of the non-specified reserve to the initial

total allowable catch (ITAC) and total allowable catch (TAC) of Aleutian Islands (AI) Greenland turbot, Bering Sea (BS) sablefish, Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) Alaska plaice, BSAI northern rockfish, BSAI "other flatfish," BSAI shortraker rockfish, BSAI sculpins, BSAI skates, and Central and Western Aleutian Islands (CAI/WAI) blackspotted/rougheye rockfish in the BSAI management area. This action is necessary to allow the fisheries to continue operating. It is intended to promote the goals and objectives of the fishery management plan for the BSAI management area.

DATES: Effective November 1, 2018 through 2400 hrs, Alaska local time, December 31, 2018. Comments must be received at the following address no later than 4:30 p.m., Alaska local time, November 16, 2018.

ADDRESSES: Submit your comments, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2017-0108, by either of the following methods:

- **Electronic Submission:** Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to <https://www.regulations.gov/docket?D=NOAA-NMFS-2017-0108>, click the "Comment Now!" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- **Mail:** Submit written comments to Glenn Merrill, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Mail comments to P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668.

Instructions: NMFS may not consider comments if they are sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the comment period ends. All comments received are a part of the public record and NMFS will post the comments for public viewing on www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender is publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter "N/A" in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steve Whitney, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the (BSAI) exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management 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 2018 ITAC of AI Greenland turbot was established as 144 metric tons (mt), the 2018 ITAC of BS sablefish was established as 1,208 mt, the 2018 TAC of BSAI Alaska plaice was established as 16,100 mt, the 2018 ITAC of BSAI northern rockfish was established as 5,185 mt, the 2018 ITAC of BSAI "other flatfish" was established as 3,400 mt, the 2018 TAC of BSAI shortraker rockfish was established as 150 mt, the 2018 ITAC of BSAI sculpins was established as 4,250 mt, the 2018 ITAC of BSAI skates was established as 22,950 mt, and the 2018 TAC of CAI/WAI blackspotted/rougheye rockfish was established as 150 mt by the final 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications for groundfish of the BSAI (83 FR 8365, February 27, 2018 and 83 FR 28169, June 18, 2018). In accordance with § 679.20(a)(3) the Regional Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has reviewed the most current available data and finds that the ITACs for AI Greenland turbot, BS sablefish, BSAI Alaska plaice, BSAI northern rockfish, BSAI "other flatfish," BSAI shortraker rockfish, BSAI sculpins, BSAI skates, and CAI/WAI blackspotted/rougheye rockfish need to be supplemented from the non-specified reserve to promote efficiency in the utilization of fishery resources in the BSAI and allow fishing operations to continue.

Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(b)(3), NMFS apportions from the non-specified reserve of groundfish 25 mt to AI Greenland turbot, 55 mt to BS sablefish, 1,460 mt to BSAI Alaska plaice ITAC, 700 mt to BSAI northern rockfish ITAC, 700 mt to BSAI "other flatfish" ITAC, 100 mt to BSAI shortraker rockfish ITAC, 750 mt to BSAI sculpins ITAC, 6,130 mt to BSAI skates ITAC, and 28 mt to the CAI/WAI blackspotted/rougheye rockfish TAC in the BSAI management area. These apportionments are consistent with § 679.20(b)(1)(i) and do not result in overfishing of any target species because the revised ITACs and TACs are equal to or less than the specifications of the acceptable biological catch in the final 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (83 FR 8365, February 27, 2018).

The harvest specification for the 2018 ITACs and TACs included in the harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI are revised as follows: 169 mt for AI Greenland turbot, 1,263 mt for BS sablefish, 17,560 mt for BSAI Alaska plaice, 5,885 mt for BSAI northern rockfish, 4,100 mt for BSAI "other