

specified for the Eastern Aleutian Islands District and Bering Sea subarea that is allocated annually to vessels using jig gear will be published in the **Federal Register** as part of the proposed and final annual specifications under paragraph (c) of this section. The jig gear allocation will be based on the following criteria:

- (A) The amount of Atka mackerel harvested by vessels using jig gear during recent fishing years;
- (B) The anticipated harvest of Atka mackerel by vessels using jig gear during the upcoming fishing year; and
- (C) The extent to which the jig gear allocation will support the development of a jig gear fishery for Atka mackerel while minimizing the amount of Atka mackerel TAC annually allocated to vessels using jig gear that remains unharvested at the end of the fishing year.

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(c) * * *

(6) **BSAI Atka mackerel allocations.** The proposed, interim, and final specifications will specify the allocation of BSAI Atka mackerel among gear types as authorized under paragraph (a)(8) of this section.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 961126334-7052-02; I.D. 122297A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Closures of Specified Groundfish Fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska

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

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is closing specified groundfish fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the directed fishing allowances specified for the 1998 interim total allowable catch (TAC) amounts for the GOA.

DATES: Effective 0001 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), January 1, 1998, until superseded by the Final 1998 Harvest Specification for Groundfish, which will be published in the **Federal Register**.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Mary Furuness, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The groundfish fishery in the exclusive economic zone of the GOA is managed by NMFS according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Fishing by U.S. vessels is governed by regulations implementing the FMP at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

In accordance with § 679.20(d), if the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), determines that the amount of a target species or "other species" category apportioned to a fishery or, with respect to pollock and Pacific cod, to an inshore or offshore component allocation, will be reached, the Regional Administrator may establish a directed fishing allowance for that species or species group. If the Regional Administrator establishes a directed fishing allowance, and that allowance is or will be reached before the end of the fishing year, NMFS will prohibit directed fishing for that species or species group in the specified GOA Regulatory Area or district (see 679.20(d)(1)(iii)).

NMFS has published interim 1998 harvest specifications for these groundfish fisheries (62 FR 65622, December 15, 1997). The Regional Administrator has determined that the following interim TAC amounts will be reached and are necessary as incidental catch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries prior to the time that final specifications for groundfish are likely to be in effect for the 1998 fishing year:

Thornyhead rockfish	entire GOA.
Atka mackerel	entire GOA.
Sablefish	entire GOA.
"Other rockfish"	entire GOA.
Shortraker/rougheye rockfish.	entire GOA.
Pacific cod	offshore component, entire GOA.
Pollock	offshore component, entire GOA.
Deep-water flatfish ...	Western Regulatory Area.
Northern rockfish	Eastern Regulatory Area.

Consequently, in accordance with § 679.20(d)(i), the Regional Administrator establishes these interim TAC amounts as directed fishing allowances.

Further, The Regional Administrator finds that these directed fishing allowances will be reached before the end of 1998. Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(d) NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for these species in the specified areas.

These closures will be in effect beginning at 0001 hours, A.l.t., January 1, 1998, until superseded by the Final 1998 Initial Harvest Specifications for Groundfish.

While these closures are in effect, the maximum retainable bycatch amounts at § 679.20 (e) and (f) apply at any time during a fishing trip. Additional closures and restrictions may be found in existing regulations at 50 CFR part 679. These closures to directed fishing are in addition to closures and prohibitions found in regulations at 50 CFR part 679. Refer to § 679.2 for definitions of areas. The definitions of GOA deep-water flatfish and "Other rockfish" species categories are provided in the **Federal Register** publication of the interim 1998 harvest specifications (62 FR 65622, December 15, 1997).

NMFS may implement other closures at the time the Final 1998 Initial Harvest Specifications are implemented or during the 1998 fishing year, as necessary for effective conservation and management.

Classification

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

This action responds to the interim TAC limitations and other restrictions on the fisheries established in the interim 1998 harvest specifications for groundfish for the GOA. It must be implemented immediately to prevent overharvesting the 1998 interim TAC of several groundfish species in the GOA. A delay in the effective date is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. The fleet will begin to harvest groundfish on January 1, 1998. Further delay would only result in overharvest. 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.

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

Dated: December 23, 1997.

Gary C. Matlock,

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

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