

undergoing overfishing. However, the Council's decision to reduce the bag limit was not based on a need to limit the harvest of red grouper. This action is intended to extend the length of the open season and avoid in-season recreational closures.

*Comment 3:* A longer recreational closed season is preferred rather than a reduction in the bag limit. Reducing the red grouper bag limit to two fish would reduce the incentive to fish so that, even with a longer open season, the net economic effects of the action would be negative. Fishermen usually harvest two or three red grouper per angler, but having the opportunity to harvest four fish is an incentive for the trip. Offshore harvest levels should be at least three fish per angler.

*Response:* NMFS disagrees that it is preferable to have a longer closed season rather than a lower bag limit. Although it is not possible to reliably forecast changes in fishing effort or the associated economic impacts of the reduction in the red grouper bag limit with available data, public comments on this and similar rules indicate the majority of anglers prefer a longer open season. Longer open seasons provide greater flexibility to schedule trips and although some fishermen may harvest more than two fish per trip, and therefore choose to not fish under the lower limit, most anglers do not. The economic analysis in the framework document explains that in 2011–2012, when the red grouper bag limit was 4 fish, more than 90 percent of trips taken by anglers fishing from private vessels or charter vessels, and more than 98 percent of headboat trips, harvested 1 or 2 red grouper per trip. As a result, lowering the limit to two fish is not expected to adversely affect the harvest of most anglers, or their decision to fish. A longer open season with a reduced bag limit is expected to create more trips and result in greater economic benefits than a shorter season with a higher bag limit, which reduces the overall number of trips.

#### Classification

The Regional Administrator, Southeast Region, NMFS, has determined that this final rule is necessary for the conservation and management of Gulf red grouper and is consistent with the framework action, the FMP, the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable law. This final rule has been determined to be not significant for purposes of Executive Order 12866.

The Chief Counsel for Regulation of the Department of Commerce certified to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the

Small Business Administration during the proposed rule stage that this rule would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. The factual basis for this determination was published in the proposed rule and is not repeated here. No comments were received regarding the certification to the Small Business Administration. Comments regarding the general net economic effects of the action are addressed in the comments and responses section of this final rule. No changes to the final rule were made in response to these comments. As a result, a final regulatory flexibility analysis was not required and none was prepared.

#### List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 622

Fisheries, Fishing, Gulf, Recreational, Red grouper.

Dated: April 1, 2015.

Eileen Sobeck,

Assistant Administrator for Fisheries,  
National Marine Fisheries Service.

For the reasons set out in the preamble, 50 CFR part 622 is amended as follows:

#### PART 622—FISHERIES OF THE CARIBBEAN, GULF OF MEXICO, AND SOUTH ATLANTIC

- 1. The authority citation for part 622 continues to read as follows:

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

- 2. In § 622.22, the last sentence in paragraph (a)(5)(ii)(B) is revised to read as follows:

#### § 622.22 Individual fishing quota (IFQ) program for Gulf groupers and tilefishes.

- (a) \* \* \*
- (5) \* \* \*
- (ii) \* \* \*

(B) \* \* \* However, if red grouper is under a rebuilding plan, the percentage of gag multi-use allocation is equal to zero.

\* \* \* \* \*

- 3. In § 622.38, the first sentence in paragraph (b)(2) is revised to read as follows:

#### § 622.38 Bag and possession limits.

\* \* \* \* \*

- (b) \* \* \*

(2) *Groupers, combined, excluding goliath grouper*—4 per person per day, but not to exceed 1 speckled hind or 1 warsaw grouper per vessel per day, or 2 gag or 2 red grouper per person per day. \* \* \*

\* \* \* \* \*

- 4. In § 622.41, the second sentence in paragraph (e)(2)(ii) is revised and the

third sentence in the same paragraph is removed to read as follows:

#### § 622.41 Annual catch limits (ACLs), annual catch targets (ACTs), and accountability measures (AMs).

\* \* \* \* \*

(e) \* \* \*

(2) \* \* \*

(ii) \* \* \* In addition, the notification

will reduce the length of the recreational red grouper fishing season the following fishing year by the amount necessary to ensure red grouper recreational landings do not exceed the recreational ACT in the following fishing year.

\* \* \* \* \*

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#### DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

#### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

#### 50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 141021887–5172–02]

RIN 0648–XD844

#### Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Northern Rockfish 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; modification of closure.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS is opening directed fishing for northern rockfish in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (BSAI). This action is necessary to fully use the 2015 total allowable catch (TAC) of northern rockfish in the BSAI.

**DATES:** Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), April 2, 2015, through 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2015.

Comments must be received at the following address no later than 4:30 p.m., A.l.t., April 17, 2015.

**ADDRESSES:** You may submit comments on this document, identified by “NOAA–NMFS–2014–0134” by any of the following methods:

- Electronic Submission: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#/docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2014-0134>, 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: Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered by NMFS. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter "N/A" in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous). Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

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

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI 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.

Pursuant to the final 2015 and 2016 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (80 FR 11919, March 5, 2015), NMFS closed the directed fishery for northern rockfish under § 679.20(d)(1)(iii).

As of April 1, 2015, NMFS has determined that approximately 2,300 metric tons of northern rockfish initial TAC remains unharvested in the BSAI. Therefore, in accordance with § 679.25(a)(1)(i), (a)(2)(i)(C), and (a)(2)(iii)(D), and to fully utilize the 2015 TAC of northern rockfish in the BSAI, NMFS is terminating the previous closure and is opening directed fishing for northern rockfish in the BSAI. This will enhance the socioeconomic well-being of harvesters in this area. The Administrator, Alaska Region (Regional Administrator) considered the following factors in reaching this decision: (1) The current catch of northern rockfish in the BSAI and, (2) the harvest capacity and stated intent on future harvesting

patterns of vessels in participating in this fishery.

#### Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Acting 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) and § 679.25(c)(1)(ii) 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 NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the opening of northern rockfish in the BSAI. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of April 1, 2015.

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.

Without this inseason adjustment, NMFS could not allow the fishery for northern rockfish in the BSAI to be harvested in an expedient manner and in accordance with the regulatory schedule. Under § 679.25(c)(2), interested persons are invited to submit written comments on this action to the above address until April 17, 2015.

This action is required by § 679.20 and § 679.25 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: April 2, 2015.

**Emily H. Menashes,**

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

[FR Doc. 2015-07942 Filed 4-2-15; 4:15 pm]

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

#### 50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 140918791-4999-02]

RIN 0648-XD876

#### Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Catcher/Processors Using Hook-and-Line Gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska

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

**ACTION:** Temporary rule; closure.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher/processors using hook-and-line gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the A season allowance of the 2015 Pacific cod total allowable catch apportioned to catcher/processors using hook-and-line gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

**DATES:** Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), April 2, 2015, through 1200 hours, A.l.t., June 10, 2015.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Obren Davis, 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 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. Regulations governing sideboard protections for GOA groundfish fisheries appear at subpart B of 50 CFR part 680.

The A season allowance of the 2015 Pacific cod total allowable catch (TAC) apportioned to catcher/processors using hook-and-line gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA is 2,850 metric tons (mt), as established by the final 2015 and 2016 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (80 FR 10250, February 25, 2015).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator) has determined that the A season allowance of the 2015 Pacific cod TAC