

fishing vessels, allowing them to move from closed fisheries to open ones, increasing the fishing capacity in those open fisheries, and causing them to close at an accelerated pace.

Additionally, in fisheries subject to declining sideboards, delaying this rule's effectiveness could allow some vessels to inadvertently reach or exceed their new sideboard levels. Because sideboards are intended to protect traditional fisheries in other sectors, allowing one sector to exceed its new sideboards by delaying this rule's effectiveness would effectively reduce the available catch for sectors without sideboard limits. Moreover, the new TAC and sideboard limits protect the fisheries from being overfished. Thus, the delay is contrary to the public interest in protecting traditional fisheries and fish stocks.

If the final harvest specifications are not effective by March 11, 2017, which is the start of the 2017 Pacific halibut season as specified by the IPHC, the hook-and-line sablefish fishery will not begin concurrently with the Pacific halibut IFQ season. Delayed effectiveness of this action would result in confusion for sablefish harvesters and economic harm from unnecessary discard of sablefish that are caught along with Pacific halibut, as both hook-and-line sablefish and Pacific halibut are managed under the same IFQ program. Immediate effectiveness of the final 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications will allow the sablefish IFQ fishery to begin concurrently with the Pacific halibut IFQ season. Also, immediate effectiveness of this action will ensure consistent management and conservation of fishery resources based upon the best available scientific information, particularly for those species that have lower 2017 ABC and TAC limits than those established in the 2016 and 2017 harvest specifications (81 FR 14773, March 18, 2016). Immediate effectiveness also would provide the fishing industry the earliest possible opportunity to plan and conduct its fishing operations with respect to new information about TAC limits. Therefore, NMFS finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in effectiveness under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3).

Small Entity Compliance Guide

This final rule is a plain language guide to assist small entities in complying with this final rule as required by the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996. This final rule's primary purpose is to announce the final 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications and prohibited species bycatch allowances for the

groundfish fisheries of the BSAI. This action is necessary to establish harvest limits and associated management measures for groundfish during the 2017 and 2018 fishing years and to accomplish the goals and objectives of the FMP. This action directly affects all fishermen who participate in the BSAI fisheries. The specific amounts of OFL, ABC, TAC, and PSC are provided in tables to assist the reader. NMFS will announce closures of directed fishing in the **Federal Register** and information bulletins released by the Alaska Region. Affected fishermen should keep themselves informed of such closures.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 773 *et seq.*; 16 U.S.C. 1540(f); 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*; 16 U.S.C. 3631 *et seq.*; Pub. L. 105-277; Pub. L. 106-31; Pub. L. 106-554; Pub. L. 108-199; Pub. L. 108-447; Pub. L. 109-241; Pub. L. 109-479.

Dated: February 21, 2017.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 150818742-6210-02]

RIN 0648-XF244

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Vessels Using Pot Gear in the Central 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 vessels using pot gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the A season allowance of the 2017 Pacific cod total allowable catch apportioned to vessels using pot gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), February 23, 2017, through 1200 hours, A.l.t., June 10, 2017.

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 2017 Pacific cod total allowable catch (TAC) apportioned to vessels using pot gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA is 5,849 metric tons (mt), as established by the final 2016 and 2017 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (81 FR 14740, March 18, 2016) and inseason adjustment (81 FR 95063, December 27, 2016).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator) has determined that the A season allowance of the 2017 Pacific cod TAC apportioned to vessels using pot gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA will soon be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 5,839 mt and is setting aside the remaining 10 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator finds that this directed fishing allowance has been reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by vessels using pot gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA. After the effective date of this closure the maximum retainable amounts at § 679.20(e) and (f) apply at any time during a trip.

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) 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 directed fishing closure of Pacific cod for vessels using pot gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.

NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of February 21, 2017.

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.

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

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

Dated: February 22, 2017.

Karen H. Abrams,

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

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