

Area to be closed to LAGC IFQ permitted vessels for the remainder of the fishing year once the NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Administrator determines that the allowed number of trips for fishing year 2017 are projected to be taken.

Based on trip declarations by LAGC IFQ scallop vessels fishing in the Nantucket Lightship Scallop Access Area, analysis of fishing effort, and other information, NMFS projects that 837 trips will be taken as of May 30, 2017. Therefore, in accordance with § 648.59(g)(3)(iii), NMFS is closing the Nantucket Lightship Scallop Access Area to all LAGC IFQ scallop vessels as of May 30, 2017. No vessel issued an LAGC IFQ permit may fish for, possess, or land scallops in or from the Nantucket Lightship Scallop Access Area after 0001 local time, May 30, 2017. Any LAGC IFQ vessel that has declared into the Nantucket Lightship Access Area scallop fishery, complied with all trip notification and observer requirements, and crossed the VMS demarcation line on the way to the area before 0001, May 30, 2017, may complete its trip without being subject to this closure. This closure is in effect for the remainder of the 2017 scallop fishing year.

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR part 648 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866. NMFS finds good cause pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) to waive prior notice and the opportunity for public comment because it would be contrary to the public interest and impracticable. The Nantucket Lightship Scallop Access Area opened for the 2017 fishing year on March 23, 2017. The regulations at § 648.59(g)(3)(iii) require this closure to ensure that LAGC IFQ scallop vessels do not take more than their allocated number of trips in the Nantucket Lightship Scallop Access Area. The projections of the date on which the LAGC IFQ fleet will have taken all of its allocated trips in an Access Area become apparent only as trips into the area occur on a real-time basis and as activity trends begin to appear. As a result, NMFS can only make an accurate projection very close in time to when the fleet has taken all of its trips. In order to propose a closure for purposes of receiving prior public comment, NMFS would need to make a projection based on very little information, which would result in a closure too early or too late. To allow LAGC IFQ scallop vessels to continue to take trips in the Nantucket Lightship Scallop Access Area during the period necessary to

publish and receive comments on a proposed rule would likely result in vessels taking much more than the allowed number of trips in the Nantucket Lightship Scallop Access Area. Excessive trips and harvest from the Nantucket Lightship Scallop Access Area would result in excessive fishing effort in the area, where effort controls are critical, thereby undermining conservation objectives of the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan and requiring more restrictive future management measures. Also, the public had prior notice and full opportunity to comment on this closure process when we put these provisions in place. For these same reasons, NMFS further finds, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3), good cause to waive the 30-day delayed effectiveness period.

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

Dated: May 25, 2017.

Margo B. Schulze-Haugen,

Acting Deputy 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. 161020985-7181-02]

RIN 0648-XF468

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Yellowfin Sole for Vessels Participating in the BSAI Trawl Limited Access Fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for yellowfin sole in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI) for vessels participating in the BSAI trawl limited access fishery. This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the 2017 allocation of yellowfin sole total allowable catch for vessels participating in the BSAI trawl limited access fishery in the BSAI.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), May 26, 2017, through 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2017.

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.

The 2017 allocation of yellowfin sole total allowable catch for vessels participating in the BSAI trawl limited access fishery in the BSAI is 18,151 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (82 FR 11826, February 27, 2017). In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the 2017 allocation of yellowfin sole total allowable catch allocated as a directed fishing allowance for vessels participating in the BSAI trawl limited access fishery in the BSAI will soon be reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for yellowfin sole for vessels participating in the BSAI trawl limited access fishery in the BSAI.

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 closure of directed fishing for yellowfin sole by vessels fishing in the BSAI trawl limited access fishery 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 May 24, 2017.

The acting 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: May 25, 2017.

Margo B. Schulze-Haugen,
Acting Deputy Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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