DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

RIN 0648–BH02

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Yellowfin Sole Management in the Groundfish Fisheries of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

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

ACTION: Notice of availability of fishery management plan amendment; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council submitted Amendment 116 to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (BSAI FMP) to the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) for review. If approved, Amendment 116 would limit access to the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) Trawl Limited Access Sector (TLAS) yellowfin sole directed fishery by vessels delivering to motherships. Amendment 116 would establish eligibility criteria based on historical participation in the fishery, issue endorsements to groundfish License Limitation Program (LLP) licenses that meet eligibility criteria, and authorize delivery of BSAI TLAS yellowfin sole to motherships by only those vessels with an assigned groundfish LLP license with a BSAI catcher vessel TLAS yellowfin sole directed fishery endorsement.

This action is necessary to provide benefits to historic participants, mitigate the risk that a “race for fish” could develop, and help to maintain the consistently low rates of halibut bycatch in the BSAI TLAS yellowfin sole directed fishery. Amendment 116 is intended to promote the goals and objectives of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the BSAI FMP, and other applicable law.

DATES: Comments must be received no later than July 17, 2018.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on this document, identified by NOAA–NMFS–2017–0083, by any of the following methods:

• Electronic Submission: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e Rulemaking Portal. Go to www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2017-0083, 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 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).

Electronic copies of Amendment 116 and the Draft Environmental Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review prepared for this action (collectively the “Analysis”) may be obtained from www.regulations.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Bridget Mansfield, (907) 586–7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires that each regional fishery management council submit any fishery management plan amendment it prepares to NMFS for review and approval, disapproval, or partial approval by the Secretary of Commerce. The Magnuson-Stevens Act also requires that NMFS, upon receiving a fishery management plan amendment, immediately publish a notice in the Federal Register announcing that the amendment is available for public review and comment. This notice announces that proposed Amendment 116 to the FMP is available for public review and comment.

NMFS manages the groundfish fisheries in the exclusive economic zone under the FMPs. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) prepared the FMPs under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq. Regulations governing U.S. fisheries and implementing the FMP appear at 50 CFR parts 600 and 679.

Amendment 116 to the FMP would amend the species and gear endorsements on groundfish LLP licenses. The LLP was implemented under Amendment 39 and 41 to the...
The Council determined, and NMFS agrees, the eligibility requirements for a BSAI TLAS yellowfin sole directed fishery endorsement within Amendment 116 would balance the need to limit entry to the BSAI TLAS yellowfin sole directed fishery to control the pace of fishing and halibut bycatch with the needs of more recent participants by continuing to provide harvest opportunities in this fishery for AFA CPs and CVs, and non-AFA CVs.

NMFS is soliciting public comments on proposed Amendment 116 through the end of the comment period (see DATES). NMFS intends to publish in the Federal Register and seek public comment on a proposed rule that would implement Amendments 116, following NMFS’ evaluation of the proposed rule under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

Respondents do not need to submit the same comments on Amendment 116 and the proposed rule. All relevant written comments received by the end of the applicable comment period, whether specifically directed to the FMP amendments or the proposed rule will be considered by NMFS in the approval/disapproval decision for Amendment 116 and addressed in the response to comments in the final decision. Comments received after end of the applicable comment period will not be considered in the approval/disapproval decision on Amendment 116. To be considered, comments must be received, not just postmarked or otherwise transmitted, by the last day of the comment period (see DATES).

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


Kathleen E. Barrett,

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

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