

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 961126334-7052-02; I.D. 092297D]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Shortraker/Rougheye Rockfish in the Eastern Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska

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

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting retention of shortraker/rougheye rockfish in the Eastern Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). NMFS is requiring that catches of shortraker/rougheye rockfish in this area be treated in the same manner as prohibited species and discarded at sea with a minimum of injury. This action is necessary because the 1997 total allowable catch (TAC) of shortraker/rougheye rockfish in this area has been reached.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), September 23, 1997, until 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 1997.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Thomas Pearson, 907-486-6919.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone 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.

The 1997 TAC of shortraker/rougheye rockfish in the Eastern Regulatory Area of the GOA was established as 460 metric tons by the Final 1997 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the GOA (62 FR 8179, February 24, 1997). See § 679.20(c)(3)(ii).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(2), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined that the 1997 TAC for shortraker/rougheye rockfish in the Eastern Regulatory Area of the GOA has been reached. Therefore, NMFS is requiring that further catches of shortraker/rougheye rockfish in the Eastern Regulatory Area of the GOA be treated as prohibited species in accordance with § 679.21(b).

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. It must be implemented immediately to prevent overharvesting the 1997 TAC for shortraker/rougheye rockfish in the Eastern Regulatory Area of the GOA. Providing prior notice and an opportunity for public comment for this action is impracticable and contrary to public interest. The fleet has taken the 1997 TAC for shortraker/rougheye rockfish. Further delay would only result in overharvest and disrupt the FMP's objective of not exceeding the TAC throughout the year. NMFS finds for good cause that the implementation of this action cannot be delayed for 30 days. Accordingly, under 5 U.S.C. 553(d), a delay in the effective date is hereby waived.

This action is required by 50 CFR 679.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: September 23, 1997.

Bruce C. Morehead,

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

[FR Doc. 97-25670 Filed 9-23-97; 4:59 pm]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 961126334-7025-02; I.D. 092297C]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska

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

ACTION: Modification of a closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is opening directed fishing for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to fully utilize the total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod in this area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), October 1, 1997, until 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 1997.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Thomas Pearson, 907-486-6919.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone is managed by NMFS according to the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery 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 regulation implementing the FMP at subpart H of CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

In accordance with Sec. 679.20(d)(1)(iii)(A), the allowance for the Pacific cod TAC apportioned for vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area was established as 4,369 metric tons (mt) by the Final 1997 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the GOA (62 FR 8179, February 24, 1997) and subsequent apportionment of reserve (62 FR 19062, April 18, 1997). The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has established a directed fishing allowance of 3,369 mt, and set aside the remaining 1,000 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. The fishery for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA was closed to directed fishing under § 679.20(d)(1)(iii) on February 19, 1997, in order to reserve amounts anticipated to be needed for incidental catch in other fisheries (62 FR 8179, February 24, 1997).

NMFS has determined that as of September 13, 1997, 3,092 mt remain in the directed fishing allowance. Therefore, NMFS is terminating the previous closure and is opening directed fishing for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA effective 1200 hrs, A.l.t., October 1, 1997.

Classification

All other closures remain in full force and effect. This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. It must be implemented immediately in order to allow full utilization of the Pacific cod TAC. Providing prior notice and an opportunity for public comment for this action is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. Further delay would only disrupt the FMP's objective of providing a portion of the Pacific cod TAC for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA. Without this action,

the Pacific cod allocation for vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA would be underharvested, resulting in an economic loss of more than 1.7 million dollars. NMFS finds for good cause that

the implementation of this action cannot be delayed for 30 days. Accordingly, under 5 U.S.C. 553(d), a delay in the effective date is hereby waived.

This action is required by 50 CFR 679.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: September 24, 1997.

Gary C. Matlock,

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

[FR Doc. 97-25777 Filed 9-26-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F