

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 971208298-8055-02; I.D. 120498A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific cod for Vessels Using Hook-and-line and Pot Gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

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

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is closing directed fishing for Pacific cod for vessels using hook-and-line and pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the amount of the 1998 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod allocated to vessels using hook-and-line and pot gear in this area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), December 9, 1998, until 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mary Furuness, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI exclusive economic zone

according to the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands 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 CFR part 679.

In accordance with § 679.20(c)(3)(iii), the TAC of Pacific cod allocated to vessels using hook-and-line and pot gear in the BSAI was established by the Final 1998 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the BSAI (63 FR 12689, March 16, 1998) as 99,068 metric tons (mt) and subsequent reserve releases as 110,568 mt (63 FR 47218, September 4, 1998), (63 FR 63801, November 17, 1998).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the TAC of Pacific cod allocated to vessels using hook-and-line and pot gear in the BSAI will be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 110,468 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 100 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 will soon be reached. Consequently, NMFS is closing directed

fishing for Pacific cod for vessels using hook-and-line and pot gear in the BSAI.

Maximum retainable bycatch amounts may be found in the regulations at § 679.20(e) and (f).

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. It must be implemented immediately in order to prevent overharvesting the amount of Pacific cod allocated to vessels using hook-and-line and pot gear in the BSAI. A delay in the effective date is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. The Pacific cod directed fishing allowance established for vessels using hook-and-line and pot gear will soon be reached. Further delay would only result in overharvest. NMFS finds for good cause that the implementation of this action can not 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 § 679.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: December 4, 1998.

Bruce C. Morehead,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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