

Commission regime and inseason orders of the Panel. Such orders must be consistent with domestic legal obligations. The Regional Administrator, Northwest Region, NMFS, issues the inseason orders. Official notice of these inseason actions of NMFS is provided by two telephone hotline numbers described at 50 CFR 300.97(b)(1). Inseason orders must be published in the *Federal Register* as soon as practicable after they are issued. Due to the frequency with which inseason orders are issued, publication of individual orders is impractical. The 1999 orders are therefore being published in this document to avoid fragmentation.

The following inseason orders were adopted by the Panel and issued for U.S. fisheries by NMFS during the 1999 fishing season. The times listed are local times, and the areas designated are Puget Sound Management and Catch Reporting Areas as defined in the Washington State Administrative Code at Chapter 220-22.

Order No. 1999-1: Issued 5:00 p.m., July 23, 1999

Treaty Indian Fishery

Areas 4B, 5 and 6C: Open for drift gillnets from 12:00 noon July 25 to 12:00 noon July 28.

Order No. 1999-2: Issued 11:00 a.m. July 28, 1999

Treaty Indian Fishery

Areas 4B, 5, and 6C: Open for drift gillnets from 12:00 noon July 28 to 12:00 noon July 31.

Order No. 1999-3: Issued 5:00 p.m., July 30, 1999

Treaty Indian Fishery

Areas 4B, 5, and 6C: Drift gillnet open from 12:00 noon August 1 to 12:00 noon August 3.

Order No. 1999-4: Issued 9:00 a.m. August 3, 1999

Treaty Indian Fishery

Areas 4B, 5, and 6C: Open for drift gillnets from 12:00 noon August 3 to 12:00 noon August 7.

Order No. 1999-5: Issued 5:00 p.m., August 6, 1999

Treaty Indian Fishery

Areas 4B, 5 and 6C: Closed for drift gillnets from 6:00 p.m. August 6 to 12:00 noon August 7.

Order No. 1999-6: Issued at 5:00 p.m., September 10, 1999.

United States Fraser River Panel Area Waters

Areas 4B, 5 and 6C, relinquish regulatory control effective September 12.

Classification

This action is authorized by 50 CFR 300.97, and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 3636(b).

Dated: December 27, 1999.

George H. Darcy,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 99-34033 Filed 12-30-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 991223349-9349-01; I.D. 122199A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area; Interim 2000 Harvest Specifications for Groundfish

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

ACTION: Interim 2000 harvest specifications for groundfish; associated management measures.

SUMMARY: NMFS issues interim 2000 total allowable catch (TAC) amounts for each category of groundfish, Community Development Quota (CDQ) amounts, and prohibited species catch (PSC) amounts for the groundfish fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). Without interim specifications in effect on January 1, the groundfish fisheries would not be able to open on that date, which would result in unnecessary closures and disruption within the fishing industry. This action is necessary to conserve and manage the groundfish resources of the BSAI and is intended to implement the goals and objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area (FMP).

EFFECTIVE DATE: Effective 0001 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), January 1,

2000, until the effective date of the final 2000 harvest specifications for BSAI groundfish, which will be published in the **Federal Register**.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for this action and the Preliminary 2000 Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report, dated September 1999, is available from the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, West 4th Avenue, Suite 306, Anchorage, AK 99510-2252 (907-271-2809).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Shane Capron, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Federal regulations at 50 CFR part 679 implement the FMP and govern the groundfish resources of the BSAI. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) prepared the FMP, and NMFS approved it, under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. General regulations that also pertain to the U.S. fisheries appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600.

The Council met in October 1999 to review scientific information concerning groundfish stocks. The Council adopted for public review the preliminary SAFE Report for the 2000 BSAI groundfish fisheries. The preliminary SAFE Report, dated September 1999, provides an update on the status of stocks. Copies of the SAFE Report are available from the Council (see **ADDRESSEES**). The Council recommended a proposed total acceptable biological catch (ABC) of 2,247,846 mt and a proposed total TAC of 2 million metric tons (mt) for the 2000 fishing year. The proposed TAC amounts for each species were based on the best available biological and socioeconomic information.

In accordance with § 679.20(c)(1), NMFS published in the **Federal Register** proposed harvest specifications and associated management measures for groundfish in the BSAI for the 2000 fishing year (64 FR 69464 December 13, 1999). That document contains a detailed discussion of the proposed 2000 TACs, initial TACs (ITACs) and related apportionments, ABC amounts, overfishing levels, PSC amounts, and associated management measures of the BSAI groundfish fishery.

This action provides interim harvest specifications and apportionments thereof for the 2000 fishing year that will become available on January 1, 2000, and remain in effect until superseded by the final 2000 harvest

specifications. Background information concerning the 2000 groundfish harvest specification process upon which this interim action is based is provided in the above mentioned proposed specification document.

NMFS intends to initiate rulemaking that would affect the pollock fisheries. That rulemaking will include: (1) An FMP amendment to implement the American Fisheries Act as contained within the Omnibus Appropriations Bill for FY 99; Pub. L. No. 105-277 (AFA), and (2) A regulatory amendment to implement reasonable and prudent alternatives to avoid jeopardizing the continued existence of the endangered western population of Steller sea lions or adversely modifying its critical habitat. Because each of these rulemakings would affect the allocation and apportionment of the pollock TAC, these interim specifications provide pollock TAC amounts under the general allocative scheme as defined by the AFA itself, but do not specify apportionments of that interim TAC. Apportionments will be addressed in each of these rulemakings individually and in the final 2000 specifications and will be effective prior to the start of the pollock fishery which is scheduled to open on January 20, 2000.

Establishment of Interim TACs

Regulations at § 679.20(b)(1)(i) require that 15 percent of the TAC for each target species or species group, except for the hook-and-line and pot gear allocation of sablefish, be placed in a non-specified reserve. The AFA supersedes this provision for pollock by requiring that the TAC for this species be fully allocated among the CDQ program, incidental catch allowance, and inshore, catcher/processor, and mothership directed fishery allowances.

Regulations at § 679.20(b)(1)(iii) require that one-half of each TAC amount placed in the non-specified reserve be allocated to the groundfish CDQ reserve and that 20 percent of the hook-and-line and pot gear allocation of sablefish be allocated to the fixed gear sablefish CDQ reserve. Section 206(a) of the AFA requires that 10 percent of the pollock TAC be allocated to the pollock CDQ reserve. With the exception of the hook-and-line and pot gear sablefish CDQ reserve, the CDQ reserves are not further apportioned by gear. Regulations at § 679.21(e)(1)(i) also require that 7.5 percent of each PSC limit, with the exception of herring, be withheld as a PSQ reserve for the CDQ fisheries. Regulations governing the management of the CDQ and PSQ reserves are set forth at §§ 679.30 and 679.31.

Regulations at § 679.20(c)(2) provide that interim specifications become effective at 0001 hours, A.l.t., January 1, and remain in effect until superseded by the final groundfish harvest specifications. The regulations further provide that the interim specifications will be established as one-fourth of each proposed ITAC amount and apportionment thereof (not including the first seasonal allowance of pollock and Atka mackerel), one-fourth of each prohibited species catch (PSC) allowance established under § 679.21, and the first seasonal allowance of pollock and Atka mackerel TAC. As stated in the proposed specifications publication (64 FR 69464 December 13, 1999), no harvest of groundfish was authorized prior to the effective date of this action implementing the interim specifications.

Apportionment of Pollock TAC to Vessels Using Nonpelagic Trawl Gear

Regulations at § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(B) authorize NMFS, in consultation with the Council, to limit the amount of pollock that may be taken in the directed fishery for pollock using nonpelagic trawl gear. At its June 1998 meeting, the Council adopted management measures that, if approved by NMFS, would prohibit the use of nonpelagic trawl gear in the directed fishery for pollock and reduce specified prohibited species bycatch limits by amounts equal to anticipated savings in bycatch or bycatch mortality that would be expected from this prohibition. If NMFS approves these measures, a rule to implement them could be effective by mid-2000. NMFS, therefore, proposed to allocate 0 mt of the BSAI pollock TAC to the directed fishery for pollock with nonpelagic trawl gear, in order to reduce unnecessary bycatch in the 2000 pollock fishery and to carry out the Council's intent for this fishery. As a result of this proposed specification, 0 mt of BSAI pollock are available to the directed fishery for pollock with nonpelagic trawl gear on an interim basis.

Interim 2000 BSAI Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Table 1 provides interim TAC and CDQ amounts and apportionments thereof. Regulations at § 679.20(c)(2)(ii) do not provide for an interim specification for the non-trawl sablefish CDQ reserve or for sablefish managed under the Individual Fishing Quota program. As a result, fishing for the non-trawl allocation of CDQ sablefish and sablefish harvested with fixed gear is prohibited until the effective date of the final 2000 groundfish specifications.

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

TABLE 1. INTERIM 2000 TAC AMOUNTS FOR GROUND FISH AND APPORTIONMENTS THEREOF FOR THE BERING SEA AND ALEUTIAN ISLANDS MANAGEMENT AREA¹

Species & Component (if applicable)		Area &/or Gear (if applicable)	Interim TAC	Interim CDQ
Pollock ²	Inshore	BS	169,632	39,680
	Offshore	BS	135,705	
	Mothership	BS	33,926	
	CDQ	BS	.....
	ICA	BS	44,640	
	ICA	AI	2,000	
	ICA	BogDist	1,000	
Total Pollock			392,260	39,680
Pacific Cod ³		Jig	752	3,319
		H/L & Pot	19,182	
		Trawl C/Vs	8,839	
		Trawl C/Ps	8,839	
		
Total Pacific cod			37,612	3,319
Sablefish ^{4 5}		BS-Trawl	142	13
		BS-H/L & Pot	N/A	N/A
		AI-Trawl	73	6
		AI-H/L & Pot	N/A	N/A
Total Sablefish			215	19
Atka mackerel ⁶		Western AI	11,475	506
		Central AI	9,520	420
		Eastern AI/BS	14,450	319
		Jig gear	144	
		Other gear	14,306	
Total Atka mackerel			35,445	1,245
Yellowfin sole		BSAI	44,196	3,900
Rock sole		BSAI	25,500	2,250
Greenland turbot		BS	1,282	169
		AI	631	113
Total Greenland turbot			1,913	282
Arrowtooth flounder		BSAI	28,550	2,519
Flathead sole		BSAI	16,426	1,449
Other flatfish ⁷		BSAI	32,725	2,888
Pacific ocean perch		BS	298	26
		Western AI	1,322	253
		Central AI	818	117
		Eastern AI	729	72
Total Pacific ocean perch			3,167	468
Other red rockfish ⁸		BS	57	5
Sharpchin/Northern		AI	899	79
Shortraker/Rougheye		AI	205	18
Other rockfish ⁹		BS	79	7
		AI	146	13
Total other rockfish			225	20
Squid		BSAI	419	37
Other Species ¹⁰		BSAI	6,983	616
Total interim TAC			635,888	58,791

¹ Amounts are in metric tons. These amounts apply to the entire Bering Sea (BS) and Aleutian Islands (AI) area unless otherwise specified. With the exception of pollock, and for purposes of these specifications, the BS includes the Bogoslof District (BogDist).

² For the 2000 pollock fishery, all pollock amounts and apportionments thereof will remain reserved until those measures under the AFA and required by the Biological Opinion for Steller sea lions to avoid jeopardy and adverse modification to critical habitat can be implemented. These rules will be effective before January 20, 2000 and apportionments of pollock will be addressed in each of these rules in the final 2000 specifications. The first seasonal apportionment of pollock for all sectors is 40 percent of the annual TAC allocated to that sector as required by the revised final reasonable and prudent alternatives. Ten percent of the pollock TAC is allocated to the pollock CDQ fishery under paragraph 206(a) of the AFA. The pollock ITAC is equal to the TAC minus the CDQ allocation. Under authority of the AFA, NMFS is allocating 5 percent of the pollock ITAC as an incidental catch allowance (see section 206(b) of the AFA). NMFS, under regulations at § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(B), allocates zero mt of pollock to nonpelagic trawl gear. This action is based on Council intent to prohibit the use of nonpelagic trawl gear in 2000 because of concerns of unnecessary incidental catch with bottom trawl gear in the pollock fishery.

³ After subtraction of the reserves, the ITAC amount for Pacific cod is allocated 2 percent to vessels using jig gear, 51 percent to H/L gear, and 47 percent to Trawl. The Pacific cod allocation to trawl gear is split evenly between catcher vessels and catcher/processor vessels (See § 679.20(a)(7)(i)). Pacific cod ITAC seasonal apportionments to vessels using H/L or pot gear are not reflected in the interim TAC amounts. One-fourth of the ITAC gear apportionments are in effect on January 1 as an interim TAC.

⁴ Sablefish gear allocations are as follows: In the BS subarea, Trawl gear is allocated 50 percent and H/L and pot gear is allocated 50 percent of the TAC. In the AI subarea, Trawl gear is allocated 25 percent, and H/L and pot gear is allocated 75 percent of the TAC (See § 679.20(a)(4)(iii) and (iv)). Fifteen percent of the sablefish Trawl gear allocation is placed in the nonspecific reserve. One-fourth of the ITAC amount for Trawl gear is in effect January 1 as an interim TAC amount.

⁵ The sablefish H/L gear fishery is managed under the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program and subject to regulations contained in subpart D of 50 CFR part 679. Twenty percent of the sablefish H/L and pot gear final TAC amount will be reserved for use by CDQ participants. (See § 679.31(c).) Existing regulations at § 679.20(c)(2)(ii) do not provide for an interim specification for the CDQ nontrawl sablefish reserve or for an interim specification for sablefish managed under the IFQ program. In addition, in accordance with § 679.7(f)(3), retention of sablefish caught with fixed gear is prohibited unless the harvest is authorized under a valid IFQ permit and IFQ card. In 2000, IFQ permits and IFQ cards will not be valid prior to the effective date of the 2000 final specifications. Thus, fishing for sablefish with fixed gear is not authorized under these interim specifications. See subpart D of 50 CFR part 679 and § 679.23(g) for guidance on the annual allocation of IFQ and the sablefish fishing season.

⁶ Regulations at § 679.20 (a)(8) require that up to 2 percent of the Eastern AI area ITAC be allocated to the jig gear fleet. The amount of this allocation is 1 percent and was determined by the Council based on anticipated harvest capacity of the Jig gear fleet. The jig gear allocation is not apportioned by season.

⁷ "Other flatfish" includes all flatfish species except for Pacific halibut (a prohibited species), flathead sole, Greenland turbot, rock sole, arrowtooth flounder and yellowfin sole.

⁸ "Other red rockfish" includes shortraker, rougheye, sharpchin, and northern rockfish in the BS subarea.

⁹ "Other rockfish" includes all Sebastes and Sebastolobus species except for Pacific ocean perch, sharpchin, northern, shortraker, and rougheye rockfish.

¹⁰ "Other species" includes sculpins, sharks, skates, and octopus.

BILLING CODE 3510-22-C

Interim Allocation of PSC Limits for Crab, Halibut, and Herring

Under § 679.21(e), annual PSC limits are specified for red king crab, *Chionoecetes bairdi* Tanner crab, and *C. opilio* crab in applicable Bycatch Limitation Zones (see § 679.2) of the Bering Sea subarea, and for Pacific halibut and Pacific herring throughout

the BSAI. Regulations under § 679.21(e) authorize the apportionment of each PSC limit into PSC allowances for specified fishery categories. Under § 679.21(e)(1)(i), 7.5 percent of each PSC limit specified for halibut, crab, and salmon is reserved as a PSQ reserve for use by the groundfish CDQ program.

Regulations at § 679.20(c)(2)(ii) provide that one-fourth of each

proposed PSC and PSQ allowance be made available on an interim basis for harvest at the beginning of the fishing year, until superseded by the final harvest specifications. The fishery specific interim PSC allowances for halibut and crab are specified in Table 2 and are in effect at 0001 hours, A.L.T., January 1, 2000.

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

TABLE 2. INTERIM 2000 PROHIBITED SPECIES BYCATCH ALLOWANCES FOR THE BSAI TRAWL AND NON-TRAWL FISHERIES.

TRAWL FISHERIES	Prohibited Species and Zone					
	Halibut mortality (mt) BSAI	Herring (mt) BSAI	Red King Crab (animals) Zone 1 ¹	C. opilio (animals) COBLZ ²	C. bairdi (animals)	
					Zone 1 ¹	Zone 2 ¹
Yellowfin sole	239	64	4,950	777,197	65,224	282,206
Rocksole/oth.flat/flat sole ³	189	6	25,988	191,638	69,882	94,069
RKC savings subarea ³	.....	.....	11,138	.....	.....	.....
Turbot/sablefish/arrowtooth ⁴	.....	3	.....	10,646	.....	.....
Rockfish	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
July 4 - December 31 ⁵	18	2	.....	10,646	.....	1,845
Pacific cod	368	6	3,713	31,940	34,988	51,382
Midwater trawl pollock	.....	304	.....	.....	.....	.....
Pollock/Atka/other ⁵	60	38	463	18,559	3,345	4,787
TOTAL TRAWL PSC	873	421	46,250	1,040,625	173,438	434,28
NON-TRAWL FISHERIES						
Pacific cod - Total	187					
Other non-trawl - Total	21					
Groundfish pot & jig	exempt					
Sablefish hook-&-line	exempt					
TOTAL NON-TRAWL PSC	208					
PSQ RESERVE⁷	88	.....	3,750	84,375	14,063	35,213
GRAND TOTAL	1,169	421	50,000	1,125,000	187,500	469,500

¹ Refer to § 679.2 for definitions of areas.

² *C. opilio* Bycatch Limitation Zone. Boundaries are defined at § 679.21 (e)(7)(iv)(B).

³ The Council at its October 1999 meeting proposed limiting red king crab for trawl fisheries within the RKCSS to 30 percent of the total allocation to the rock sole, flathead sole, and other flatfish fishery category (§ 679.21(e)(3)(ii)(B)).

⁴ Greenland turbot, arrowtooth flounder, and sablefish fishery category.

⁵ The Council at its October 1999 meeting proposed limiting red king crab for trawl fisheries within the RKCSS to 30 percent of the total allocation to the rock sole, flathead sole, and other flatfish fishery category (§ 679.21(e)(3)(ii)(B)).

⁶ Pollock other than pelagic trawl pollock, Atka mackerel, and "other species" fishery category.

⁷ With the exception of herring, 7.5 percent of each PSC limit is allocated to the multi-species CDQ program as PSQ reserve. The PSQ reserve is not allocated by fishery, gear or season.

Prior to the beginning of the 2000 fishing year, NMFS will implement fishery closures based on these interim specifications if the Regional Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, determines that interim TAC amounts are required as incidental catch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries or if the PSC allowance for a fishery has been reached. NMFS may implement other closures at the time the final 2000 harvest specifications are implemented or during the 2000 fishing year, as necessary for effective management.

Classification

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

NMFS has prepared an EA for this action which describes the impact on the human environment that would result from implementation of the interim specifications. In December 1998, NMFS issued a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) on the groundfish TAC specifications and PSC limits under the BSAI and Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish FMPs. In July 1999, the District Court for the Western District of Washington held that the 1998 SEIS did not adequately address aspects of the BSAI and GOA FMPs. Notwithstanding the deficiencies the court noted in the 1998 SEIS, NMFS believes that the discussion of impacts and alternatives in the 1998 SEIS is directly applicable to this interim action and the EA for the interim 2000 harvest specifications, which "tiers off" (incorporates by reference) the 1998 SEIS.

Pursuant to section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), NMFS has completed a consultation on the effects of the 1999 to 2002 pollock and Atka mackerel fisheries on listed species, including the Steller sea lion, and designated critical habitat. The Biological Opinion prepared for this consultation, dated December 3, 1998, concluded that the Atka mackerel fisheries in the BSAI are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of Steller sea lions or adversely modify their designated critical habitat. However, the Biological Opinion concluded that the pollock fisheries in the BSAI and the GOA would cause jeopardy and adverse modification.

NMFS is developing a proposed rule to implement permanent reasonable and prudent alternatives (RPAs) to avoid the likelihood that the pollock fisheries off Alaska will jeopardize the continued existence of the western population of Steller sea lions or adversely modify its critical habitat. Emergency measures

which implemented RPAs for 1999, are in effect until December 31, 1999 (July 21, 1999, 64 FR 39087). Regulations implementing permanent RPAs must be effective prior to the start of the BSAI and GOA pollock fisheries which are scheduled to open on January 20, 2000, or NMFS will be obligated under the ESA to close all fishing for pollock until such measures can be implemented.

NMFS has also completed consultations on the effects of the 2000 BSAI groundfish fisheries on listed species, including the Steller sea lion and salmon, and on designated critical habitat. These consultations were completed December 23, 1999 and December 22, 1999 respectively.

A biological opinion on the BSAI hook-and-line groundfish fishery and the BSAI trawl groundfish fishery for the ESA listed short-tailed albatross was issued by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in March 1999. The conclusion continued the no jeopardy determination and the incidental take statement expressing the requirement to immediately reinstate consultations if incidental takes exceed four short-tailed albatross over two years' time (1999–2000).

In order for the BSAI groundfish fishing season to begin on January 1 (see § 679.23), § 679.20(c)(2) requires NMFS to establish interim harvest specifications to be effective on January 1 and to remain in effect until superseded by the filing of final harvest specifications with the Office of the Federal Register. Without interim specifications in effect on January 1, the groundfish fisheries would not be able to open on that date, which would result in unnecessary closures and disruption within the fishing industry. NMFS anticipates that the interim specifications will be in effect for only a short period of time before they are superseded by the final specifications. The proposed specifications were published as a proposed rule in the **Federal Register** on December 13, 1999 (64 FR 69464). Regulations at § 679.20(c)(2)(ii) require that the interim TACs be established at specified fractional amounts of the proposed harvest specifications. Accordingly, the opportunity for public comment on the proposed specifications provides opportunity for comment on these interim specifications. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds for good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) that the need to establish interim TAC limitations and other restrictions on fisheries in the BSAI, effective on January 1, 2000, makes it impracticable and contrary to the public interest to provide prior

notice and opportunity for public comment on this rule. Likewise, the AA finds for good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3) that the need to establish interim TAC levels and other management measures in the BSAI, effective on January 1, 2000, makes it impractical and contrary to the public interest to delay the effective date of the limits and measures for 30 days.

Because these interim specifications are not required to be issued with prior notice and opportunity for public comment, the analytical requirements of the Regulatory Flexibility Act do not apply. Consequently, no regulatory flexibility analysis has been prepared.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 773 *et seq.*, 1801 *et seq.*, and 3631 *et seq.*

Dated: December 27, 1999.

Penelope D. Dalton,

*Assistant Administrator for Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

[FR Doc. 99–34030 Filed 12–28–99; 4:25 pm]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 991223348–9348–01; I.D. 122199B]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Gulf of Alaska; Interim 2000 Harvest Specifications

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

ACTION: Interim 2000 harvest specifications for groundfish and associated management measures.

SUMMARY: NMFS issues interim 2000 total allowable catch (TAC) amounts for each category of groundfish and specifications for prohibited species bycatch allowances for the groundfish fishery of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). Without interim specifications in effect on January 1, the groundfish fisheries would not be able to open on that date, which would result in unnecessary closures and disruption within the fishing industry. This action is necessary to conserve and manage the groundfish resources of the GOA, and is intended to implement the goals and objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP).

DATES: Effective 0001 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), January 1, 2000, until the effective date of the final 2000 harvest