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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 131021878-4158-02]

RIN 0648-XD693

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Inseason Adjustment to the 2015 Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Pollock, Atka Mackerel, and Pacific cod Total Allowable Catch Amounts

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; inseason adjustment; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS is adjusting the 2015 total allowable catch (TAC) amounts for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) pollock, Atka mackerel, and Pacific cod fisheries. This action is necessary because NMFS has determined these TACs are incorrectly specified, and will ensure the BSAI pollock, Atka mackerel, and Pacific cod TACs are the appropriate amounts based on the best available scientific information. This action is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), January 1, 2015, until the effective date of the final 2015 and 2016 harvest specifications for BSAI groundfish, unless otherwise modified or superseded through publication of a notification in the Federal Register.

Comments must be received at the following address no later than 4:30 p.m., A.l.t., January 16, 2015.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on this document, identified by FDMS Docket Number NOAA-NMFS-2013-0152 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-2013-0152](http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2013-0152), 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](http://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). Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

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

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 final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014) set the 2015 BSAI pollock TAC at 1,277,075 metric tons (mt), the 2015 BSAI Atka mackerel TAC at 32,491 mt, the 2015 Bering Sea Pacific cod TAC at 251,712 mt, and the Aleutian Islands Pacific cod TAC at 6,487 mt. In December 2014, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) recommended a 2015 BSAI pollock TAC of 1,310,000 mt, which is more than the 1,277,075 mt TAC established by the final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI. The Council also recommended a 2015 BSAI Atka mackerel TAC of 54,500 mt, which is more than the 32,491 mt TAC established by the final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI. Furthermore, the Council recommended a 2015 Bering Sea Pacific cod TAC of 240,000 mt, and an Aleutian Islands Pacific cod TAC of 9,422 mt, which is less than the Bering Sea Pacific cod TAC of 251,712 mt, and more than the Aleutian Islands Pacific cod TAC of 6,487 mt established by the final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI. The Council's recommended 2015 TACs, and the area and seasonal apportionments, are based on the Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation report (SAFE), dated November 2014, which NMFS has determined is the best available scientific information for these fisheries.

Steller sea lions occur in the same location as the pollock, Atka mackerel, and Pacific cod fisheries and are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Pollock, Atka mackerel, and Pacific cod are a principal prey species for Steller sea lions in the BSAI. The seasonal apportionment of pollock, Atka mackerel, and Pacific cod harvest is necessary to ensure the groundfish fisheries are not likely to cause jeopardy of extinction or adverse modification of critical habitat for Steller sea lions. NMFS published regulations and the revised harvest limit amounts for Atka mackerel, Pacific cod, and pollock fisheries to implement Steller sea lion protection measures to insure that groundfish fisheries of the BSAI are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the western distinct population segment of Steller sea lions or destroy or adversely modify their designated critical habitat (79 FR 70286, November 25, 2014). The regulations at § 679.20(a)(5) specify how the Bering Sea pollock TAC will be apportioned. The regulations at § 679.20(a)(7) specify how the BSAI Pacific cod TAC will be apportioned. The regulations at § 679.20(a)(8) specify how the BSAI Atka mackerel TAC will be apportioned.

In accordance with § 679.25(a)(1)(iii), (a)(2)(i)(B), and (a)(2)(iv), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that, based on the November 2014 SAFE report for this fishery, the current BSAI pollock, Atka mackerel, and Pacific cod TACs are incorrectly specified. Pursuant to § 679.25(a)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator is adjusting the 2015 BSAI pollock TAC to 1,310,000 mt, the 2015 BSAI Atka mackerel TAC to 54,500, the 2015 Bering Sea Pacific cod TAC to 240,000 mt, and the Aleutian Islands Pacific cod TAC to 9,422 mt.

Therefore, Table 1 of the final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014) is revised consistent with this adjustment.

Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i), Table 3 of the final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014) is revised for the 2015 BSAI allocations of pollock TAC to the directed pollock fisheries and to the Community Development Quota (CDQ) directed fishing allowances consistent with this adjustment. The Steller sea lion protection measure final rule (79 FR 70286, November 25, 2014), sets harvest limits for pollock in the A season (January 20 to June 10) in Areas 543, 542, and 541, see § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(6). In Area 541, the 2015 A season pollock harvest limit is no more than 30 percent, or 8,898 mt, of the Aleutian Islands ABC of 29,659 mt. In Area 542, the 2015 A season pollock harvest limit is no more than 15 percent, or 4,449 mt, of the Aleutian Islands ABC of 29,659 mt. In Area 543, the 2015 A season pollock harvest limit is no more than 5 percent, or 1,483 mt, of the Aleutian Islands pollock ABC of 29,659 mt.

TABLE 3–FINAL 2015 ALLOCATIONS OF POLLOCK TACS TO THE DIRECTED POLLOCK FISHERIES AND TO THE CDQ DIRECTED FISHING ALLOWANCES (DFA)<sup>1</sup>

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Area and sector	2015 Allocations	2015 A season <sup>1</sup>		2015 B season <sup>1</sup>
		A season DFA	SCA harvest limit <sup>2</sup>	B season DFA
Bering Sea subarea TAC <sup>1</sup>	1,310,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
CDQ DFA	131,000	52,400	36,680	78,600
ICA <sup>1</sup>	47,160	n/a	n/a	n/a
AFA Inshore	565,920	226,368	158,458	339,552
AFA Catcher/Processors <sup>3</sup>	452,736	181,094	126,766	271,642
Catch by C/Ps	414,253	165,701	n/a	248,552
Catch by CVs <sup>3</sup>	38,483	15,393	n/a	23,090
Unlisted C/P Limit <sup>4</sup>	2,264	905	n/a	1,358
AFA Motherships	113,184	45,274	31,692	67,910
Excessive Harvesting Limit <sup>5</sup>	198,072	n/a	n/a	n/a
Excessive Processing Limit <sup>6</sup>	339,552	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total Bering Sea DFA	1,131,840	452,736	316,915	679,104
Aleutian Islands subarea ABC	29,659	n/a	n/a	n/a
Aleutian Islands subarea TAC <sup>1</sup>	19,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
CDQ DFA	1,900	760	n/a	1,140
ICA	2,400	1,200	n/a	1,200
Aleut Corporation	15,100	12,259	n/a	2,841
Area harvest limit 541	1,483	n/a	n/a	n/a
542	4,449	n/a	n/a	n/a
543	8,898	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bogoslof District ICA <sup>7</sup>	100	n/a	n/a	n/a

<sup>1</sup>Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A), the BS subarea pollock, after subtracting the CDQ DFA (10 percent) and the ICA (4.0 percent), is allocated as a DFA as follows: inshore sector - 50 percent, catcher/processor sector (C/P) - 40 percent, and mothership sector - 10 percent. In the BS subarea, 40 percent of the DFA is allocated to the A season (January 20-June 10) and 60 percent of the DFA is allocated to the B season (June 10-November 1). Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(2)(i) and (ii), the annual AI pollock TAC, after subtracting first for the CDQ directed fishing allowance (10 percent) and second the ICA (2,400 mt), is allocated to the Aleut Corporation for a pollock directed fishery. In the AI subarea, the A season is allocated 40 percent of the ABC and the B season is allocated the remainder of the pollock directed fishery.

<sup>2</sup>In the BS subarea, no more than 28 percent of each sector’s annual DFA may be taken from the SCA before April 1.

<sup>3</sup>Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(4), not less than 8.5 percent of the DFA allocated to listed catcher/processers shall be available for harvest only by eligible catcher vessels delivering to listed catcher/processers.

<sup>4</sup>Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(4)(iii), the AFA unlisted catcher/processers are limited to harvesting not more than 0.5 percent of the catcher/processers sector’s allocation of pollock.

<sup>5</sup>Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(6), NMFS establishes an excessive harvesting share limit equal to 17.5 percent of the sum of the non-CDQ pollock DFAs.

<sup>6</sup>Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(7), NMFS establishes an excessive processing share limit equal to 30.0 percent of the sum of the non-CDQ pollock DFAs.

<sup>7</sup>Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(6), NMFS establishes harvest limits for pollock in the A season in Area 541 no more than 30 percent, in Area 542 no more than 15 percent, and in Area 543 no more than 5 percent of the Aleutian Islands pollock ABC.

<sup>8</sup>The Bogoslof District is closed by the final harvest specifications to directed fishing for pollock. The amounts specified are for ICA only and are not apportioned by season or sector.

Note: Seasonal or sector apportionments may not total precisely due to rounding.

Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(8), Table 4 of the final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014) is revised for the 2015 seasonal and spatial allowances, gear shares, CDQ reserve, incidental catch allowance, and Amendment 80 allocation of the BSAI Atka mackerel TAC consistent with this adjustment.

TABLE 4—FINAL 2015 SEASONAL AND SPATIAL ALLOWANCES, GEAR SHARES, CDQ RESERVE, INCIDENTAL CATCH ALLOWANCE, AND AMENDMENT 80 ALLOCATIONS OF THE BSAI ATKA MACKEREL TAC

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Sector <sup>1</sup>	Season <sup>2,3,4</sup>	2015 allocation by area		
		Eastern Aleutian District/Bering Sea	Central Aleutian District <sup>5</sup>	Western Aleutian District
TAC	n/a	27,000	17,000	10,500
CDQ reserve	Total	2,889	1,819	1,124
	A	1,445	910	562
	Critical Habitat	n/a	546	337
	B	1,445	910	562
	Critical Habitat	n/a	546	337
ICA	Total	1,000	75	40
Jig <sup>6</sup>	Total	116	0	0
BSAI trawl limited access	Total	2,300	1,511	0
	A	1,150	755	0
	Critical Habitat	n/a	453	0
	B	1,150	755	0
	Critical Habitat	n/a	453	0
Amendment 80 sectors	Total	20,696	13,595	9,337
	A	10,348	6,798	4,668
	B	10,348	6,798	4,668
Alaska Groundfish Cooperative	Total <sup>6</sup>	11,616	8,116	5,742
	A	5,808	4,058	2,871
	Critical Habitat	n/a	2,435	1,723
	B	5,808	4,058	2,871
	Critical Habitat	n/a	2,435	1,723
Alaska Seafood Cooperative	Total <sup>6</sup>	9,080	5,479	3,594
	A	4,540	2,740	1,797
	Critical Habitat	n/a	1,644	1,078
	B	4,540	2,740	1,797
	Critical Habitat	n/a	1,644	1,078

<sup>1</sup> Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii) allocates the Atka mackerel TACs, after subtracting the CDQ reserves, jig gear allocation, and ICAs to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors. The allocation of the ITAC for Atka mackerel to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors is established in Table 33 to part 679 and § 679.91. The CDQ reserve is 10.7 percent of the TAC for use by CDQ participants (see §§ 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(C) and 679.31).

<sup>2</sup> Regulations at §§ 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(A) and 679.22(a) establish temporal and spatial limitations for the Atka mackerel fishery.

<sup>3</sup> The seasonal allowances of Atka mackerel are 50 percent in the A season and 50 percent in the B season.

<sup>4</sup> Section 679.23(e)(3) authorizes directed fishing for Atka mackerel with trawl gear during the A season from January 20 to June 10 and the B season from June 10 to December 31.

<sup>5</sup>Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(1)(i) limits no more than 60 percent of the annual TACs in Areas 542 and 543 to be caught inside of critical habitat; and §679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(1)(ii) equally divided between the A and B seasons as defined at § 679.23(e)(3) and (2) requires the TAC in area 543 shall be no more than 65% of ABC.

<sup>6</sup> Section 679.20(a)(8)(i) requires that up to 2 percent of the Eastern Aleutian District and the Bering Sea subarea TAC be allocated to jig gear after subtracting the CDQ reserve and ICA. The amount of this allocation is 0.5 percent. The jig gear allocation is not apportioned by season.

**Note:** Seasonal or sector apportionments may not total precisely due to rounding.

Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(7), Table 6 of the final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014) is revised for the 2015 gear shares and seasonal allowances of the BSAI Pacific cod TAC consistent with this adjustment.

TABLE 6—FINAL 2015 GEAR SHARES AND SEASONAL ALLOWANCES OF THE BSAI PACIFIC COD TAC  
[Amounts are in metric tons]

Gear sector	Percent	2015 share of gear sector total	2015 share of sector total	2015 seasonal apportionment	
				Seasons	Amount
BS TAC	n/a	240,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
BS CDQ	n/a	25,680	n/a	see § 679.20(a)(7)(i)(B)	n/a
BS non-CDQ TAC	n/a	214,320	n/a	n/a	n/a
AI TAC	n/a	9,422	n/a	n/a	n/a
AI CDQ	n/a	1,008	n/a	see § 679.20(a)(7)(i)(B)	n/a
AI non-CDQ TAC	n/a	8,414	n/a	n/a	n/a
Western Aleutian Island Limit	n/a	2,478	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total BSAI non-CDQ TAC <sup>1</sup>	100	222,734	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total hook-and-line/pot gear	60.8	135,422	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hook-and-line/pot ICA <sup>2</sup>	n/a	500	n/a	see § 679.20(a)(7)(ii)(B)	n/a
Hook-and-line/pot sub-total	n/a	134,922	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hook-and-line catcher/processor	48.7	n/a	108,071	Jan 1-Jun 10	55,116
				Jun 10-Dec 31	52,955
Hook-and-line catcher vessel ≥ 60 ft LOA	0.2	n/a	444	Jan 1-Jun 10	226
				Jun 10-Dec 31	217
Pot catcher/processor	1.5	n/a	3,329	Jan 1-Jun 10	1,698
				Sept 1-Dec 31	1,631
Pot catcher vessel ≥ 60 ft LOA	8.4	n/a	18,641	Jan 1-Jun 10	9,507
				Sept 1-Dec 31	9,134
Catcher vessel < 60 ft LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear	2	n/a	4,438	n/a	n/a
Trawl catcher vessel	22.1	49,224	n/a	Jan 20-Apr 1	36,426
				Apr 1-Jun 10	5,415
				Jun 10-Nov 1	7,384
AFA trawl catcher/processor	2.3	5,123	n/a	Jan 20-Apr 1	3,842
				Apr 1- Jun 10	1,281
				Jun 10-Nov 1	0
Amendment 80	13.4	29,846	n/a	Jan 20-Apr 1	22,385
				Apr 1- Jun 10	7,462
				Jun 10-Nov 1	0
Alaska Groundfish Cooperative	n/a	n/a	4,711	Jan 20-Apr 1	3,533
				Apr 1- Jun 10	1,178
				Jun 10-Dec 31	0
Alaska Seafood Cooperative	n/a	n/a	25,135	Jan 20-Apr 1	18,851
				Apr 1- Jun 10	6,284
				Jun 10-Dec 31	0
Jig	1.4	3,118	n/a	Jan 1-Apr 30	1,871
				Apr 30-Aug 31	624
				Aug 31-Dec 31	624

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<sup>1</sup> The gear shares and seasonal allowances for BSAI Pacific cod TAC are based on the sum of the BS and AI Pacific cod TACs, after the subtraction of CDQ. If the TAC for Pacific cod in either the AI or BS is reached, then directed fishing for Pacific cod in that subarea may be prohibited, even if a BSAI allowance remains.

<sup>2</sup> The ICA for the hook-and-line and pot sectors will be deducted from the aggregate portion of Pacific cod TAC allocated to the hook-and-line and pot sectors. The Regional Administrator approves an ICA of 500 mt for 2015 based on anticipated incidental catch in these fisheries.

**Note:** Seasonal or sector apportionments may not total precisely due to rounding.

## Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The 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 allow for harvests that exceed the appropriate allocations for pollock, Atka mackerel, and Pacific cod in the BSAI based on the best scientific information available. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of December 26, 2014, and additional time for prior public comment would result in conservation concerns for the ESA-listed Steller sea lions.

The 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.

Under § 679.25(c)(2), interested persons are invited to submit written comments on this action to the above address until January 16, 2015.

This action is required by § 679.20 and § 679.25 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: December 30, 2014.

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Alan D. Risenhoover,  
Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,  
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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