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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 141021887-5172-02]

RIN 0648-XD846

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Reallocation of Pollock in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

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

ACTION: Temporary rule.

SUMMARY: NMFS is reallocating the projected unused amounts of the Aleut Corporation pollock directed fishing allowance from the Aleutian Islands subarea to the Bering Sea subarea. This action is necessary to provide opportunity for harvest of the 2015 total allowable catch of pollock, 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.), [INSERT DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER], through 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2015.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steve Whitney, 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 (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.

In the Aleutian Islands subarea, the portion of the 2015 pollock total allowable catch (TAC) allocated to the Aleut Corporation directed fishing allowance (DFA) is 14,700 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2015 and 2016 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (80 FR 11919, March 5, 2015).

As of March 17, 2015, the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, (Regional Administrator) has determined that 2,554 mt of the A season allowance of the Aleut Corporation pollock DFA in the Aleutian Islands subarea will not be harvested. Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(4), NMFS reallocates 2,554 mt of A season pollock DFA from the Aleutian Islands subarea to the 2015 Bering Sea subarea DFAs. The 2,554 mt of the A season Aleut Corporation pollock DFA is added to the 2015 Bering Sea non-CDQ DFA. As a result, the 2015 harvest specifications for pollock in the Aleutian Islands subarea included in the final 2015 and 2016 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (80 FR 11919, March 5, 2015, and 80 FR 12781, March 11, 2015) are revised as follows: 12,146 mt to the annual Aleut Corporation pollock DFA and 7,350 mt to the A season Aleut Corporation pollock DFA. Furthermore, pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5), Table 4 of the final 2015 and 2016 harvest specifications for groundfish in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (80 FR 11919, March 5, 2015, and 80 FR 12781, March 11, 2015), is revised to make 2015 pollock allocations consistent with this reallocation. This reallocation results in adjustments to the 2015 pollock allocations established at § 679.20(a)(5).

TABLE 4—FINAL 2015 ALLOCATIONS OF POLLOCK TACS TO THE DIRECTED POLLOCK FISHERIES AND TO THE CDQ DIRECTED FISHING ALLOWANCES (DFA)¹

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Area and sector	2015 Allocations	2015 A season ¹		2015 B season ¹
		A season DFA	SCA harvest limit ²	B season DFA
Bering Sea subarea TAC ¹	1,314,454	n/a	n/a	n/a
CDQ DFA	132,900	53,160	37,212	79,740
ICA ¹	47,160	n/a	n/a	n/a
AFA Inshore	567,197	226,879	158,815	340,318
AFA Catcher/Processors ³	453,758	181,503	127,052	272,255
Catch by C/Ps	415,188	166,075	n/a	249,113
Catch by CVs ³	38,569	15,428	n/a	23,142
Unlisted C/P Limit ⁴	2,269	908	n/a	1,361
AFA Motherships	113,439	45,376	31,763	68,064
Excessive Harvesting Limit ⁵	198,519	n/a	n/a	n/a
Excessive Processing Limit ⁶	340,318	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total Bering Sea DFA	1,134,394	453,758	317,630	680,636
Aleutian Islands subarea ABC	29,659	n/a	n/a	n/a
Aleutian Islands subarea TAC ¹	14,546	n/a	n/a	n/a
CDQ DFA	0	0	n/a	0
ICA	2,400	1,200	n/a	1,200
Aleut Corporation	12,146	7,350	n/a	4,796
Area harvest limit 541	8,898	n/a	n/a	n/a
542	4,449	n/a	n/a	n/a
543	1,483	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bogoslof District ICA ⁷	100	n/a	n/a	n/a

¹Pursuant 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.

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

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

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

⁵Pursuant 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.

⁶Pursuant 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.

⁷Pursuant 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.

⁸The 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.

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 delay the reallocation of Aleutian Island subarea pollock. Since the pollock fishery is currently underway, it is important to immediately inform the industry as to the final Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands pollock allocations. Immediate notification is necessary to allow for the orderly conduct and efficient operation of this fishery; allow the industry to plan for the fishing season and avoid potential disruption to the fishing fleet as well as processors; and provide opportunity to harvest increased seasonal pollock allocations while value is optimum. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as March 17, 2015.

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.

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

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

Dated: March 20, 2015.

Emily H. Menashes,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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