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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 141021887-5172-02]

RIN 0648-XE471

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific cod in the Western Aleutian Islands District of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod, including for the Community Development Quota program (CDQ), in the Western Aleutian Islands district of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the Western Aleutian Islands district Pacific cod harvest limit of the 2016 total allowable catch (TAC) in the Aleutian Islands subarea of the BSAI.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), February 23, 2016, through 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2016.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI 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 Western Aleutian Islands district Pacific cod harvest limit of the 2016 TAC in the Aleutian Islands subarea of the BSAI is 3,377 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2015 and 2016 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (80 FR 11919, March 5, 2015) and inseason adjustment (81 FR 184, January 5, 2016). In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined that the Area 543 Pacific cod harvest limit of the 2016 Pacific cod TAC in the Aleutian Islands subarea of the BSAI will soon be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 2,377 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 1,000 mt as incidental catch in directed fishing for other species. In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator finds that this directed fishing allowance has been reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod in the Western Aleutian Islands district of the BSAI.

After the effective date of this closure the maximum retainable amounts at § 679.20(e) and (f) apply at any time during a trip.

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 directed fishing closure of Pacific cod in the Western Aleutian Islands district of the BSAI. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of February 22, 2016.

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: February 23, 2016

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

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