



**BILLING CODE 3510-22-P**

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**50 CFR Part 679**

**[Docket No. 161020985-7181-02]**

**RIN 0648-XF296**

**Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Northern Rockfish in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area**

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

**ACTION:** Temporary rule; modification of closure.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS is opening directed fishing for northern rockfish in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (BSAI). This action is necessary to fully use the 2016 total allowable catch (TAC) of northern rockfish in the BSAI.

**DATES:** Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 16, 2017, through 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2017. Comments must be received at the following address no later than 4:30 p.m., A.l.t., [*insert date 15 days after date of publication in the Federal Register*].

**ADDRESSES:** You may submit comments on this document, identified by *NOAA-NMFS-2016-0140*, by either 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-2016-0140*, 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).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Steve Whitney, 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.

Pursuant to the final 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (82 FR 11826, February 27, 2017), NMFS closed the directed fishery for northern rockfish under § 679.20(d)(1)(iii).

As of March 14, 2017, NMFS has determined that approximately 4,000 metric tons of northern rockfish initial TAC remains unharvested in the BSAI. Therefore, in

accordance with § 679.25(a)(1)(i), (a)(2)(i)(C), and (a)(2)(iii)(D), and to fully utilize the 2017 TAC of northern rockfish in the BSAI, NMFS is terminating the previous closure and is opening directed fishing for northern rockfish in the BSAI. This will enhance the socioeconomic well-being of harvesters in this area. The Administrator, Alaska Region (Regional Administrator) considered the following factors in reaching this decision: (1) the current catch of northern rockfish in the BSAI and, (2) the harvest capacity and stated intent on future harvesting patterns of vessels in participating in this fishery.

### **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) and § 679.25(c)(1)(ii) 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 opening of northern rockfish in 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 March 14, 2017.

The acting 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.

Without this inseason adjustment, NMFS could not allow the fishery for northern rockfish in the BSAI to be harvested in an expedient manner and in accordance with the

regulatory schedule. Under § 679.25(c)(2), interested persons are invited to submit written comments on this action to the above address until [*insert date 15 days after date of publication in the Federal Register*].

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: March 16, 2017.

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

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