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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 160920866-7167-02]

RIN 0648-XF332

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Reallocation of Pacific Cod in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; reallocation.

SUMMARY: NMFS is reallocating the projected unused amount of Pacific cod from catcher vessels using trawl gear to vessels using pot gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to allow the A season apportionment of the 2017 total allowable catch of Pacific cod to be harvested.

DATES: Effective March 31, 2017 through 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), June 10, 2017.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Obren Davis, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (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 A season allowance of the 2017 Pacific cod total allowable catch (TAC) apportioned to catcher vessels using trawl gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA is 6,933 metric tons (mt), as established by the final 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (82 FR 12032, February 27, 2017).

The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, (Regional Administrator) has determined that catcher vessels using trawl gear will not be able to harvest 1,500 mt of the A season apportionment of the 2017 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(12)(i)(B)(4). In accordance with § 679.20(a)(12)(ii)(B) the Regional Administrator has also determined that vessels using pot gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA currently have the capacity to harvest this excess allocation and reallocates 1,500 mt to vessels using pot gear. Therefore, NMFS apportions 1,500 mt of Pacific cod from the A season apportionments for catcher vessels using trawl gear to vessels using pot gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.

The harvest specifications for Pacific cod included in the final 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (82 FR 12032, February 26, 2017) are revised as follows: 5,433 mt to the A season apportionment and 12,141 mt to the annual amount for catcher vessels using trawl gear and 7,349 mt to the A season apportionment and 10,621 mt to the annual amount to vessels using pot gear.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Acting 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 Pacific cod specified from catcher vessels using trawl gear to vessels using pot gear. Since the fishery is currently open, it is important to immediately inform the industry as to the revised allocations. Immediate notification is necessary to allow for the orderly conduct and efficient operation of this fishery, to allow the industry to plan for the fishing season, and to avoid potential disruption to the fishing fleet as well as processors. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of March 29, 2017.

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 30, 2017.

Karen H. Abrams,
Acting Deputy Director,
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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