



**BILLING CODE 3510-22-P**

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**50 CFR Part 679**

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

**RIN 0648-XF579**

**Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Alaska Plaice 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; closure.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Alaska plaice in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the 2017 Alaska plaice total allowable catch (TAC) specified for the BSAI.

**DATES:** Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), July 26, 2017, through 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2017.

**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 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 2017 Alaska plaice TAC specified for the BSAI is 11,050 metric tons as established by the final 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (82 FR 11826, February 27, 2017).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, (Regional Administrator) has determined that the 2017 Alaska plaice TAC in the BSAI will soon be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 10,050 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 1,000 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. 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 Alaska plaice in 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 fishery closure of Alaska plaice 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 July 24, 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: July 25, 2017.

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Jennifer M. Wallace,  
Acting Director,  
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,  
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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