



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 230306-0065; RTID 0648-XD250]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod 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 a closure; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS is opening directed fishing for Pacific cod by American Fisheries Act (AFA) trawl catcher/processors (CPs) in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (BSAI). This action is necessary to fully use the 2023 total allowable catch of Pacific cod allocated to AFA trawl CPs in the BSAI.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), September 1, 2023, through 1200 hours, A.l.t., November 1, 2023. 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 docket number NOAA-NMFS-2022-0094, by any of the following methods:

Electronic Submission: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to <https://www.regulations.gov> and enter NOAA-NMFS-2022-0094 in the Search box. Click on the “Comment” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

Mail: Submit written comments to Gretchen Harrington, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS. 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 <https://www.regulations.gov> without change. All personal identifying information (*e.g.*, name, address, *etc.*), 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 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 (Magnuson-Stevens Act). Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR parts 600 and 679.

NMFS closed directed fishing for Pacific cod by AFA trawl CPs in the BSAI under § 679.20(d)(1)(iii) on January 19, 2023 (88 FR 3318, January 19, 2023).

NMFS has determined that as of August 24, 2023, approximately 1,000 metric tons of Pacific cod remain in the 2023 Pacific cod total allowable catch (TAC) allocated to the AFA trawl CPs in the BSAI. Therefore, in accordance with § 679.25(a)(1)(i), (a)(2)(i)(C), and (a)(2)(iii)(D), and to fully use the 2023 TAC of Pacific cod in the BSAI, NMFS is terminating the previous closure and is opening directed fishing for Pacific cod

by AFA trawl CPs in the BSAI. The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, considered the following factors in reaching this decision: (1) the current catch of Pacific cod by AFA trawl CPs in the BSAI and, (2) the harvest capacity and stated intent on future harvesting patterns of vessels in participating in this fishery.

Classification

NMFS issues this action pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This action is required by 50 CFR part 679, which was issued pursuant to section 304(b), and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), there is good cause to waive prior notice and an opportunity for public comment on this action, as notice and comment would be 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 directed fishing for Pacific cod by AFA trawl CPs 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 August 24, 2023.

The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA 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.

Without this inseason adjustment, NMFS could not allow the fishery for Pacific cod by AFA trawl CPs 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*].

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

Dated: August 25, 2023.

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

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