



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 240227-0061]

RTID 0648-XD691

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Catcher

Vessels Less Than 50 Feet Length Overall Using Hook-and-Line Gear 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; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher vessels less than 50 feet (15.2 meters (m)) length overall using hook-and-line (HAL) gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the A season allowance of the 2024 total allowable catch (TAC) apportioned to catcher vessels less than 50 feet (15.2 m) length overall using HAL gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 26, 2024, through 1200 hours, A.l.t., June 10, 2024.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Abby Jahn, 907-586-7416.

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 (Magnuson-Stevens 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 2024 Pacific cod TAC apportioned to catcher vessels less than 50 feet (15.2 m) length overall using HAL gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA is 1,410 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA (89 FR 15484, March 4, 2024).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Regional Administrator has determined that the A season allowance of the 2024 Pacific cod TAC apportioned to catcher vessels less than 50 feet (15.2 m) length overall using HAL gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA will soon be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 1,260 mt and is setting aside the remaining 150 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 catcher vessels less than 50 feet (15.2 m) length overall using HAL gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.

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

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 closure of Pacific cod by catcher vessels less than 50 feet (15.2 m) length overall using HAL gear in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of March 25, 2024.

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 and opportunity for public comment.

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

Dated: March 26, 2024.

Everett Wayne Baxter,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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