



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 240304-0068; RTID 0648-XD854]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Reallocation of 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; reallocation.

SUMMARY: NMFS is reallocating the projected unused amount of Pacific cod from vessels using jig gear to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 meters (m)) length overall using hook-and-line or pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area. This action is necessary to allow the A season apportionment of the 2024 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod to be harvested.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), April 4, 2024, through 2400 hours, (A.l.t.), December 31, 2024.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Krista Milani, 907-581-2062.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (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 (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 apportionment of the 2024 Pacific cod TAC specified for vessels using jig gear in the BSAI is 1,169 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (89 FR 17287, March 11, 2024).

The 2024 Pacific cod TAC allocated to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) length overall (LOA) using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI is 2,767 mt as established by final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (89 FR 17287, March 11, 2024).

The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, (Regional Administrator) has determined that jig vessels will not be able to harvest 1,100 mt of the A season apportionment of the 2024 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(7)(ii)(A)(I). Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(a)(7)(iv)(C), NMFS apportions 1,100 mt of Pacific cod from the A season jig gear apportionment to the annual amount specified for catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear.

The harvest specifications for 2024 Pacific cod included in final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (89 FR 17287, March 11, 2024) are revised as follows: 69 mt to the A season apportionment and 848 mt to the annual amount for vessels using jig gear, and 3,867 mt to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear.

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 reallocation of Pacific cod specified from jig vessels to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear. NMFS was unable to publish a notification providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of April 3, 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: April 3, 2024.

Everett Wayne Baxter,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.