



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 240304-0068]

RTID 0648-XD853

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

SUMMARY: NMFS is opening directed fishing for sablefish by vessels using trawl gear
in the Bering Sea subarea and the Aleutian Islands subarea of the Bering Sea and
Aleutian Islands Management Area (BSAI). This action is necessary to fully use the 2024
sablefish total allowable catch (TAC) allocated to vessels using trawl gear in the Bering
Sea subarea and the Aleutian Islands subarea of the BSAI.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), May 1, 2024, through 2400
hours, A.l.t., December 31, 2024. Comments must be received at the following address
(see **ADDRESSES**) no later than 4:30 p.m., A.l.t., May 15, 2024.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on this document, identified by NOAA-
NMFS-2023-0124, 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-2023-
0124 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 “NA” 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 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.

Pursuant to the final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (89 FR 17287, March 11, 2024) NMFS closed directed fishing for sablefish using trawl gear in the Bering Sea subarea and the Aleutian Islands subarea of the BSAI under § 679.20(d)(1)(iii).

As of April 24, 2024, NMFS has determined that approximately 3,380 metric tons (mt) in the Bering Sea subarea and 1,780 mt in the Aleutian Islands subarea of sablefish initial TAC allocated to trawl gear remains unharvested. Therefore, in accordance with §

679.25(a)(1)(i), (a)(2)(i)(C), and (a)(2)(iii)(D), and to fully utilize the 2024 sablefish TAC allocated to trawl in the Bering Sea subarea and the Aleutian Islands subarea of the BSAI, NMFS is terminating the previous closure and is opening directed fishing for sablefish by vessels using trawl gear in the Bering Sea subarea and the Aleutian Islands subarea of the BSAI. This will enhance the socioeconomic well-being of harvesters in this area. The Administrator, Alaska Region (Regional Administrator) considered the following factors in reaching this decision: (1) the current catch of sablefish allocated to trawl gear in the Bering Sea subarea and the Aleutian Islands subarea of 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 sablefish by vessels using trawl gear in the Bering Sea subarea and the Aleutian Islands subarea of 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 April 24, 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.

Without this inseason adjustment, NMFS could not allow the fishery for sablefish by vessels using trawl gear in Bering Sea subarea and the Aleutian Islands subarea of 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 May 15, 2024.

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

Dated: April 25, 2024.

Everett Wayne Baxter,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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