

This action increases the commercial skate wing possession limit from the incidental limit of 500 lb (227 kg) of skate wings (1,135 lb (515 kg) whole weight) per trip to the seasonal 4,100 lb (1,860 kg) of skate wings (9,307 lb (4,222 kg) whole weight) per trip. This action is being implemented to allow the skate wing fishery an opportunity to fully attain the annual TAL while minimizing the possibility of exceeding it. Upon filing of this notice, no person may possess on board or land more than 4,100 lb (1,860 kg) of skate wings (9,307 lb (4,222 kg) whole weight) per trip for the remainder of the 2017 fishing year, unless under specific exemption. This action applies to the skate wing fishery only and does not affect vessels fishing in accordance with a skate bait letter of authorization. On May 1, 2018, the 2018 fishing year begins, and the commercial skate wing possession limit will return to the skate wing season 1 (May 1, 2018 through August 31, 2018) possession limit of 2,600 lb (1,179 kg) of skate wings or 5,902 lb (2,677 kg) whole weight per trip.

Classification

This action is taken under 50 CFR part 648 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, finds good cause pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) to waive prior notice and the opportunity for public comment because it would be contrary to the public interest. This action ends the previous trip limit reduction in the commercial skate bait fishery, and raises the possession limit from the incidental limit to the standard season 2 limit in order to allow fishermen the opportunity to fully harvest the annual skate wing TAL. The regulations at § 648.322(b)(2)(iii) allow this by stating that trip limits should not be reduced if they prevent the attainment of the TAL. If implementation of this adjustment were delayed to solicit prior public comment, this could further prevent the fishery's ability to harvest the full TAL, thereby undermining the objectives of the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan. This action also relieves the restriction of the former trip limit reduction in the wing fishery for the remainder of the 2017 fishing year. The Assistant Administrator further finds, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3), good cause to waive the 30-day delayed effectiveness period for the reason stated above.

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

Dated: April 9, 2018.

Jennifer M. Wallace,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 170816769-8162-02]

RIN 0648-XG159

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone off Alaska; Sablefish 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 retention of sablefish by vessels using trawl gear and not participating in the cooperative fishery of the Rockfish Program in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary because the 2018 total allowable catch of sablefish allocated to vessels using trawl gear and not participating in the cooperative fishery of the Rockfish Program in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA has been reached.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), April 9, 2018, through 2400 hours, A.l.t., December 31, 2018.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, (907) 586-7228.

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. 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 2018 total allowable catch (TAC) of sablefish allocated to vessels using trawl gear and not participating in the cooperative fishery of the Rockfish Program in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA is 501 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (83 FR 8768, March 1, 2018).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(2), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the 2018 TAC of sablefish allocated to vessels using trawl gear and not participating in the cooperative fishery of the Rockfish Program in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA will be reached. Therefore, NMFS is requiring that sablefish by vessels using trawl gear and not participating in the cooperative fishery of the Rockfish Program in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA be treated as prohibited species in accordance with § 679.21(b). This closure does not apply to fishing by vessels participating in the cooperative fishery of the Rockfish Program for the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.

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 prohibiting the retention of sablefish by vessels using trawl gear and not participating in the cooperative fishery of the Rockfish Program 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 April 6, 2018.

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 § 679.21 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: April 9, 2018.

Jennifer M. Wallace,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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