

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

Dated: January 17, 2024.

Everett Wayne Baxter,

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. 230306-0065; RTID 0648-XD662]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Trawl Catcher/Processors Using Trawl Gear 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; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by American Fisheries Act (AFA) trawl catcher/processors in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the annual 2024 Pacific cod total allowable catch (TAC) allocated to AFA trawl catcher/processors in the BSAI.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), January 20, 2024, through 1200 hours, A.l.t., November 1, 2024.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Adam Zaleski, 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. 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 annual apportionment of the 2024 Pacific cod TAC allocated to AFA trawl catcher/processors in the BSAI is 3,201 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (88 FR 14926, March 10, 2023) and inseason adjustment (88 FR 88836, December 26, 2023).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i) and § 679.20(d)(1)(ii)(B), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the annual 2024 Pacific cod TAC allocated to AFA trawl catcher/processors in the BSAI is necessary to account for the incidental catch in other anticipated fisheries. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 0 mt and is setting aside the remaining 3,201 mt as incidental catch 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 Pacific cod by AFA trawl catcher/processors in the BSAI.

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 AFA trawl catcher/processors 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 January 10, 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.

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Dated: January 18, 2024.

Everett Wayne Baxter,

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

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