

Authority

The authority for these actions is the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

Martha Williams,

Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 24034–0068; RTID 0648–XE347]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Reallocation of Atka Mackerel 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 the 2024

Atka mackerel incidental catch allowance (ICA) for the Bering Sea subarea and Eastern Aleutian district (BS/EAI) to the Amendment 80 cooperative allocation for the BS/EAI in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to allow the 2024 total allowable catch of Atka mackerel in the BSAI to be fully harvested.

DATES: Effective October 7, 2024 through 2400 hours, A.l.t., December 31, 2024.

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 parts 600 and 679.

The 2024 Atka mackerel ICA for the BS/EAI is 800 metric tons (mt) and the

2024 Atka mackerel total allowable catch allocated to the Amendment 80 cooperative for the BS/EAI is 25,081 mt as established by the final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (89 FR 17287, March 11, 2024).

The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined that 700 mt of the Atka mackerel ICA for the BS/EAI will not be harvested. Therefore, in accordance with § 679.91(f), NMFS reallocates 700 mt of Atka mackerel from the BS/EAI ICA to the BS/EAI Amendment 80 cooperative allocation in the BSAI. In accordance with § 679.91(f), NMFS will reissue the cooperative quota permit for the reallocated Atka mackerel following the procedures set forth in § 679.91(f)(3).

The harvest specifications for Atka mackerel included in the harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (89 FR 17287, March 11, 2024) are revised as follows: 100 mt of Atka mackerel for the BS/EAI ICA and 25,781 mt of Atka mackerel for the Amendment 80 cooperative allocation for the BS/EAI. Table 7 is revised and republished in its entirety as follows:

TABLE 7—FINAL 2024 SEASONAL AND SPATIAL ALLOWANCES, GEAR SHARES, CDQ RESERVE, INCIDENTAL CATCH ALLOWANCE, AND AMENDMENT 80 ALLOCATIONS OF THE BSAI ATKA MACKEREL TAC

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Sector ¹	Season ^{2,3,4}	2024 Allocation by area		
		Eastern Aleutian District/Bering Sea	Central Aleutian District ⁵	Western Aleutian District
TAC	n/a	32,260	16,754	23,973
CDQ reserve	Total	3,452	1,793	2,565
	A	1,726	896	1,283
	Critical Habitat	n/a	538	770
	B	1,726	896	1,283
	Critical Habitat	n/a	538	770
Non-CDQ TAC	n/a	28,808	14,961	21,408
ICA	Total	100	75	20
Jig ⁶	Total	140		
BSAI trawl limited access	Total	2,787	1,489	
	A	1,393	744	
	Critical Habitat	n/a	447	
	B	1,393	744	
	Critical Habitat	n/a	447	
Amendment 80 sector	Total	25,781	13,398	21,388
	A	12,891	6,699	10,694
	Critical Habitat	n/a	4,019	6,416
	B	12,891	6,699	10,694
	Critical Habitat	n/a	4,019	6,416

Note: Seasonal or sector apportionments may not total precisely due to rounding.

¹ Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii) allocates the Atka mackerel total allowable catches (TACs), after subtracting the community development quota (CDQ) reserves, ICAs, and jig gear allocation, to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors. The allocation of the Initial total allowable catch (ITAC) for Atka mackerel to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors is established in table 33 to 50 CFR part 679 and § 679.91. The CDQ reserve is 10.7 percent of the TAC for use by CDQ participants (see § 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(C)).

² Sections 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(A) and 679.22(a) establish temporal and spatial limitations for the Atka mackerel fishery.

³ The seasonal allowances of Atka mackerel for the CDQ reserve, BSAI trawl limited access sector, and Amendment 80 sector are 50 percent in the A season and 50 percent in the B season.

⁴ Section 679.23(e)(3) authorizes directed fishing for Atka mackerel with trawl gear during the A season from January 20 to June 10 and the B season from June 10 to December 31.

⁵ Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(1)(i) limits no more than 60 percent of the annual TACs in Areas 542 and 543 to be caught inside of Steller sea lion protection areas; section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(1)(ii) equally divides the annual harvest limits between the A and B seasons as defined at § 679.23(e)(3); and section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(2) requires that the TAC in Area 543 shall be no more than 65 percent of Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) in Area 543.

⁶ Sections 679.2 and 679.20(a)(8)(i) require that up to 2 percent of the Eastern Aleutian Islands District and the Bering Sea subarea TAC be allocated to jig gear after subtracting the CDQ reserve and the ICA. NMFS sets the amount of this allocation for 2024 at 0.5 percent. The jig gear allocation is not apportioned by season.

This will enhance the socioeconomic well-being of harvesters dependent upon Atka mackerel in this area. The Regional Administrator considered the following factors in reaching this decision: (1) the current catch of Atka mackerel ICA in the BS/EAI, and (2) the harvest capacity and stated intent on future harvesting patterns of the Amendment 80 cooperative that participates in this BS/EAI 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 harvest of Atka mackerel in the BS/EAI fishery. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of September 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.

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

Dated: October 3, 2024.

Karen H. Abrams,

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

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