

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 679**

[Docket No. 041126332–5039–02; I.D. 022106B]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Rock Sole, Flathead Sole, and “Other Flatfish” by Vessels Using Trawl Gear in 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 closing directed fishing for rock sole, flathead sole, and “other flatfish” by vessels using trawl gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the first seasonal allowance of the 2006 halibut bycatch allowance specified for the trawl rock sole, flathead sole, and “other flatfish” fishery category in the BSAI.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), February 21, 2006, through 1200 hrs, A.l.t., April 1, 2006.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 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. 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 first seasonal allowance of the 2006 halibut bycatch allowance specified for the trawl rock sole, flathead sole, and “other flatfish” fishery category in the BSAI is 448 metric tons as established by the 2005 and 2006 final harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (70 FR 8979, February 24, 2005).

In accordance with § 679.21(e)(7)(v), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined that the first seasonal allowance of the 2006 halibut bycatch allowance specified for the trawl rock sole, flathead sole, and “other flatfish” fishery category in the BSAI has been caught. Consequently, NMFS

is closing directed fishing for rock sole, flathead sole, and “other flatfish” by vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI.

“Other flatfish” includes Alaska plaice, as well as all other flatfish species except for Pacific halibut (a prohibited species), Greenland turbot, rock sole, yellowfin sole, flathead sole, and arrowtooth flounder.

After the effective date of this closure the maximum retainable amounts at § 679.20(e) and (f) apply at any time during a trip.

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 the closure of directed fishing for rock sole, flathead sole, and “other flatfish” by vessels using trawl gear 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 February 18, 2006.

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

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

Dated: February 21, 2006.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 06–1751 Filed 2–21–06; 2:49 pm]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 679**

[Docket No. 041126332–5039–02; I.D. 021706A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Catcher/Processor Vessels Using Hook-and-line 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 catcher/processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the A season allowance of the 2006 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod specified for catcher/processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in the BSAI.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), February 18, 2006, until 1200 hrs, A.l.t., June 10, 2006.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 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. 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 allowance of the 2006 Pacific cod TAC allocated to catcher/processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in the BSAI is 43,916 metric tons as established by the 2005 and 2006 final harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (70 FR 8979, February 24, 2005). See §§ 679.20(c)(3)(iii) and (c)(5), and (a)(7)(i)(C).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined that the A season allowance of the 2006 Pacific cod TAC allocated to catcher/processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in the BSAI will soon be reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting