

Dated: February 6, 2002.

Robert Brenner,

Acting Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 011218304-1304-01; I.D. 020802A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific cod by Vessels Catching Pacific Cod for Processing by the Offshore Component in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the A season amount of the Pacific cod total allowable catch (TAC) apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component of the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), February 9, 2002, until 1200 hrs, A.l.t., September 1, 2002.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mary Furuness, 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 2002 A season Pacific cod TAC apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA is 1,011 metric tons (mt) as established by an emergency interim rule implementing 2002 harvest specifications and associated management measures for the groundfish fisheries off Alaska (67 FR 956, January 8, 2002).

In accordance with § 679.20 (d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the A season amount of the Pacific cod TAC apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component of the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA will be reached. In accordance with § 679.20(a)(11)(iii), Pacific cod bycatch taken between the closure of the A season and opening of the B season shall be deducted from the B season TAC apportionment. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 1,011 mt. In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator finds that this directed fishing allowance will soon be reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in

the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

Maximum retainable bycatch amounts may be found in the regulations at § 679.20(e) and (f).

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, finds that the need to immediately implement this action to prevent exceeding the amount of the 2002 A season Pacific cod TAC specified for the offshore component in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA constitutes 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)(3)(B) and 50 CFR 679.20 (b)(3)(iii)(A), as such procedures would be unnecessary and contrary to the public interest. Similarly, the need to implement these measures in a timely fashion to prevent exceeding the 2002 A season Pacific cod TAC specified for the offshore component in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA constitutes good cause to find that the effective date of this action cannot be delayed for 30 days. Accordingly, under 5 U.S.C. 553(d), a delay in the effective date is hereby waived.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: February 8, 2002.

Bruce C. Morehead,

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

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