

FR 23913, May 6, 2003), the West Coast Salmon Plan, and regulations implementing the West Coast Salmon Plan 50 CFR 660.409 and 660.411. Prior notice and opportunity for public comment was impracticable because NMFS and the state agencies have insufficient time to provide for prior notice and the opportunity for public comment between the time the fishery catch and effort data are collected to determine the extent of the fisheries, and the time the fishery closure must be implemented to avoid exceeding the quota. Failure to close the fishery upon attainment of the quota would allow the quota to be exceeded, resulting in fewer spawning fish and possibly reduced yield of the stocks in the future. For the same reasons, the AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in effectiveness required under U.S.C. 553(d)(3).

This action is authorized by 50 CFR 660.409 and 660.411 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: August 28, 2003.

John H. Dunnigan,

*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. 021122286-3036-02; I.D. 090803B]

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

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Prohibition of retention

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting retention of Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). NMFS is requiring that catch of Pacific cod in this area be treated in the same manner as prohibited species and discarded at sea with a minimum of injury. This action is necessary because the amount of the 2003 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component in this area has been achieved.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), September 9, 2003, until 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2003.

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 amount of the 2003 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component in the Central Regulatory Area (Statistical Areas 620 and 630, between 147 degrees and 159 degrees W. longitudes) of the GOA was established as 20,421 metric tons by the Final 2003 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the GOA (68 FR 9924, March 3, 2003).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(2), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined that the amount of the 2003 TAC apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by

the inshore component of the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA has been reached. Therefore, NMFS is requiring that further catches of Pacific cod caught by vessels catching Pacific Cod for processing by the inshore component of the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA be treated as prohibited species in accordance with § 679.21(b).

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 contrary to the public interest. This requirement is contrary to the public interest as it would delay the prohibition of retention of Pacific cod by vessel catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component, lead to exceeding the TAC, and therefore reduce the public's ability to use and enjoy the fishery resource.

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 is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: September 8, 2003.

Dean Swanson,

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

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