

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 635**

[Docket No. 220919–0193; RTID 0648–XD222]

**Atlantic Highly Migratory Species;
Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Fisheries;
Closure of the General Category June
Through August Fishery for 2023**

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS closes the General category fishery for large medium and giant (*i.e.*, measuring 73 inches (185 cm) curved fork length or greater) Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) for the remainder of the June through August time period. This action applies to Atlantic Tunas General category (commercial) permitted vessels and highly migratory species (HMS) Charter/Headboat permitted vessels with a commercial sale endorsement when fishing commercially for BFT. This action also waives the previously-scheduled restricted-fishing days (RFDs) for the remainder of the June through August time period. With the RFDs waived during the closure, fishermen aboard General category permitted vessels and HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessels may tag and release BFT of all sizes, subject to the requirements of the catch-and-release and tag-and-release programs. On September 1, 2023, the fishery will reopen automatically and previously-scheduled RFDs for September will resume.

DATES: Effective 11:30 p.m., local time, August 17, 2023, through August 31, 2023.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Becky Curtis, becky.curtis@noaa.gov, 301–427–8503, or Larry Redd, Jr., larry.redd@noaa.gov, 301–427–8503.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Atlantic HMS fisheries, including BFT fisheries, are managed under the authority of the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (ATCA; 16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.*) and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act; 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*). The 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and its amendments are implemented by regulations at 50 CFR part 635. Section 635.27 divides the U.S. BFT quota recommended by the

International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and as implemented by the United States among the various domestic fishing categories, per the allocations established in the 2006 Consolidated HMS FMP and its amendments. NMFS is required under the Magnuson-Stevens Act to provide U.S. fishing vessels with a reasonable opportunity to harvest quotas under relevant international fishery agreements such as the ICCAT Convention, which is implemented domestically pursuant to ATCA.

Under § 635.28(a)(1), NMFS files a closure action with the Office of the Federal Register for publication when a BFT quota (or subquota) is reached or is projected to be reached. Retaining, possessing, or landing BFT under that quota category is prohibited on or after the effective date and time of a closure notice for that category until the opening of the relevant subsequent quota period or until such date as specified.

As described in § 635.27(a), the current baseline U.S. BFT quota is 1,316.14 metric tons (mt) (not including the 25 mt ICCAT allocated to the United States to account for bycatch of BFT in pelagic longline fisheries in the Northeast Distant Gear Restricted Area). The current baseline quota for the General category is 710.7 mt. The General category baseline quota is suballocated to different time periods. Relevant to this action, the baseline subquota for the June through August time period is 355.4 mt.

Closure of the June Through August 2023 General Category Fishery

To date, reported landings for the General category June through August time period total approximately 344 mt. Based on these landings, NMFS has determined that the June through August time period subquota of 355.4 mt is projected to be reached and exceeded shortly. Therefore, retaining, possessing, or landing large medium or giant (*i.e.*, measuring 73 inches (185 cm) curved fork length or greater) BFT by persons aboard vessels permitted in the Atlantic Tunas General category and HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessels (while fishing commercially) must cease at 11:30 p.m. local time on August 17, 2023. This action applies to Atlantic Tunas General category (commercial) permitted vessels and HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessels with a commercial sale endorsement when fishing commercially for BFT and is taken consistent with the regulations at § 635.28(a)(1). The General category will automatically reopen September 1,

2023, for the September 2023 time period.

Adjustment of Daily Retention Limit for Selected Dates

On May 25, 2023 (88 FR 33839), NMFS published a final rule implementing RFDs every Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday from July 1 through November 30, 2023. Since the fishery will be closed for the remainder of the June through August time period, NMFS has decided to waive the previously-scheduled RFDs for the remainder of that time period. Previously-scheduled RFDs will resume on September 1, 2023.

With the RFDs waived during the closure, consistent with § 635.23(a)(4), fishermen aboard General category permitted vessels and HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessels may tag and release BFT of all sizes, subject to the requirements of the catch-and-release and tag-and-release programs at § 635.26. All BFT that are released must be handled in a manner that will maximize their survival, and without removing the fish from the water, consistent with requirements at § 635.21(a)(1). For additional information on safe handling, see the “Careful Catch and Release” brochure available at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/outreach-and-education/careful-catch-and-release-brochure/>.

Monitoring and Reporting

NMFS will continue to monitor the BFT fisheries closely. Dealers are required to submit landing reports within 24 hours of a dealer receiving BFT. Late reporting by dealers compromises NMFS’ ability to timely implement actions such as quota and retention limit adjustments, as well as closures, and may result in enforcement actions. Additionally, and separate from the dealer reporting requirement, General and HMS Charter/Headboat category vessel owners are required to report the catch of all BFT retained or discarded dead within 24 hours of the landing(s) or end of each trip, by accessing <https://www.hmspermits.noaa.gov>, using the HMS Catch Reporting app, or calling 888–872–8862 (Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.).

After the fishery reopens on September 1, depending on the level of fishing effort and catch rates of BFT, NMFS may determine that additional adjustments are necessary to ensure available subquotas are not exceeded or to enhance scientific data collection from, and fishing opportunities in, all geographic areas. If needed, subsequent

adjustments will be published in the **Federal Register**. In addition, fishermen may access <https://www.hmspermits.noaa.gov>, for updates on quota monitoring and inseason adjustments.

Classification

NMFS issues this action pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and regulations at 50 CFR part 635 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

The Assistant Administrator for NMFS (AA) finds that pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), there is good cause to waive prior notice and opportunity to provide comment on this action, as notice and comment would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest for the following reasons. Specifically, the regulations implementing the 2006 Consolidated HMS FMP and amendments provide for inseason retention limit adjustments and fishery closures to respond to the unpredictable nature of BFT availability on the fishing grounds, the migratory nature of this species, and the regional variations in the BFT fishery. Providing for prior notice and an opportunity to comment is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as this fishery is currently underway and, based on landings information, the available time period subquota is projected to be reached shortly. Delaying this action could result in BFT landings exceeding the June through August time period subquota. Taking this action does not raise conservation or management concerns. NMFS notes that the public had an opportunity to comment on the underlying rulemakings that established the U.S. BFT quota and the inseason adjustment criteria.

For all of the above reasons, the AA also finds that pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d), there is good cause to waive the 30-day delay in effective date.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.* and 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: August 16, 2023.

Kelly Denit,

*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-XD263]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Reallocation of Pacific Cod 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 Pacific cod from vessels using jig gear, trawl catcher vessels, and catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 feet (18.3 meters (m)) length overall (LOA) using hook-and-line gear to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to allow the 2023 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod to be harvested.

DATES: Effective August 18, 2023, through 2400 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), December 31, 2023.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Krista Milani, 907-581-2062.

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 part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The 2023 Pacific cod TAC specified for vessels using jig gear in the BSAI is 748 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (88 FR 14926, March 10, 2023), correction (88 FR 18258, March 28, 2023), and reallocation (88 FR 18443, March 29, 2023).

The 2023 Pacific cod TAC specified for trawl catcher vessels in the BSAI is 26,807 mt as established by the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (88 FR 14926, March 10, 2023) and correction (88 FR 18258, March 28, 2023).

The 2023 Pacific cod TAC specified for catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line gear in the BSAI is 241 mt as established by the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (88 FR 14926, March 10, 2023) and correction (88 FR 18258, March 28, 2023).

The 2023 Pacific cod TAC allocated to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI is 3,360 mt as established by final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (88 FR 14926, March 10, 2023), correction (88 FR 18258, March 28, 2023), and reallocation (88 FR 18443, March 29, 2023).

The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, (Regional Administrator) has determined that jig vessels will not be able to harvest 650 mt of the 2023 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(7)(ii)(A)(1), trawl catcher vessels will not be able to harvest 500 mt of the 2023 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(7)(ii)(A)(9), and catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line gear will not be able to harvest 230 mt of the 2023 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(7)(ii)(A)(3).

Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(a)(7)(iv)(C), NMFS apportions 650 mt of Pacific cod from the jig vessels to the annual amount specified for catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear. Also, in accordance with § 679.20(a)(7)(iii)(A), NMFS reallocates 500 mt from trawl catcher vessels, and 230 mt from the catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line gear to the annual amount specified for catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear.

The harvest specifications for 2023 Pacific cod included in final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (88 FR 14926, March 10, 2023), correction (88 FR 18258, March 28, 2023), and reallocation (88 FR 18443, March 29, 2023) is revised as follows: 98 mt to vessels using jig gear, 26,307 mt to trawl catcher vessels, 11 mt to catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line gear, and 4,740 mt to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear.

Classification

NMFS issues this action pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This action is required by 50 CFR