

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 30, 2004.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

Acting 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. 031125292-4061-02; I.D. 093004D]

Fisheries of the Economic Exclusive Zone Off Alaska; Groundfish Fisheries by Vessels Using Hook-and-Line Gear in 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 groundfish by vessels using hook-and-line gear in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA), except for demersal shelf rockfish in the Southeast Outside District or sablefish. This action is necessary because the 2004 bycatch mortality allowance of Pacific halibut apportioned to hook-and-line gear targeting groundfish other than

demersal shelf rockfish in the Southeast Outside District or sablefish has been reached.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), October 2, 2004, through 1200 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2004.

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 Pacific halibut bycatch mortality allowance for groundfish included in the other hook-and-line fishery, which is defined at § 679.21(d)(4)(iii)(C), was established as 290 metric tons by the 2004 final harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (69 FR 9261, February 27, 2004). The other hook-and-line fishery includes all groundfish except for demersal shelf rockfish in the Southeast Outside District or sablefish.

In accordance with § 679.21(d)(7)(ii), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined that the 2004 Pacific halibut bycatch mortality allowance specified for the hook-and-line groundfish fisheries in the GOA, other than demersal shelf rockfish in the Southeast Outside District or sablefish, has been reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for groundfish other than demersal shelf rockfish in the Southeast Outside

District or sablefish by vessels using hook-and-line gear.

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 the fishery resulting in exceeding the 2004 Pacific halibut bycatch mortality allowance specified for the hook-and-line groundfish fisheries in the GOA, other than demersal shelf rockfish in the Southeast Outside District or sablefish.

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: September 30, 2004.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

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

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