

Assuming a discard rate of 14.7 percent, the estimate of dead discards should be revised from 195.2 mt to 341.6 mt, or an increase of 146.4 mt.

The total reduction in the 1996 fishing year landings quota for the longline fishery is 168.3 mt plus 146.4 mt, or 314.7 mt. This leaves a total directed landing quota of 749.7 mt for the Atlantic swordfish fishery.

Closure of the Fishery

The landings of swordfish in the longline fishery in the second semiannual season reached 610 mt by March 1, 1997, leaving 139.7 mt in the landings quota. Additional quota remaining for the second half includes 90 mt from the bridge period quota (January 1–May 31, 1996) and 96 mt from the bycatch quota for 1996. Thus, the total quota remaining as of March 1, 1997, is 325.7 mt (139.7 + 90 + 96 mt). In 1996, landings of swordfish by longliners reached 213 mt in March. If the same rate occurs in March of 1997, this would leave 113 mt for both April and May.

During a two month closure of the directed fishery in 1995, with a bycatch limit of 15 fish per trip for November and 6 fish per trip in December, the bycatch of swordfish was estimated to be 64 mt. Under a bycatch limit of 5 fish per trip during the proposed closure, NMFS estimates that 50 mt could be landed during the two month closure, leaving 63 mt available for the directed fishery during April. At the rate of landings which occurred during April 1996 (43 mt per week), 63 mt would allow 11 days of directed fishing prior to the closure. Thus, NMFS estimates that the directed quota for swordfish will be taken on or before April 12, 1997.

Therefore, NMFS announces that the directed fishery for swordfish is closed at 12 noon on April 12, 1997. All vessels must be in port with their swordfish offloaded on or before this closing date. This notice provides more than a four week period during which swordfish vessel owners can plan their fishing and sale of landings prior to the closure deadline. During the closure of the directed fishery, a person may not fish for swordfish from the North Atlantic stock, and no more than 5 swordfish per vessel per trip may be possessed or landed incidental to longline fishing for other species. As previously stated, no harpoon fishery set-aside has been established for this semi-annual period. Therefore, a person fishing aboard a vessel using or having aboard harpoon gear may not fish for swordfish from the North Atlantic swordfish stock, and no swordfish may be possessed in the

North Atlantic Ocean, including the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea, north of 5° N. latitude, or landed in an Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, or Caribbean state.

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR 630.24(d) and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: March 14, 1997.

Gary C. Matlock,

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

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50 CFR Part 679

[I.D. 031497A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Season Opening

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

ACTION: Notice of fishing season dates.

SUMMARY: NMFS is opening the directed fishery for sablefish with fixed gear managed under the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program. The season will open on 12:00 noon, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 15, 1997, and will close 12:00 noon, A.l.t., November 15, 1997. This period runs concurrently with the IFQ season for Pacific halibut announced by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC).

EFFECTIVE DATE: March 15, 1997, 12:00 noon, A.l.t., through November 15, 1997, 12:00 noon, A.l.t.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: John Lepore, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Beginning in 1995, fishing for Pacific halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*) and sablefish (*Anoplopoma fimbria*) with fixed gear in the IFQ regulatory areas defined in 50 CFR 679.2 has been managed under the IFQ Program. The IFQ Program is a regulatory regime designed to promote the conservation and management of these fisheries and to further the objectives of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the Northern Pacific Halibut Act. Persons holding quota share receive an annual allocation of IFQ. Persons receiving an annual allocation of IFQ are authorized to harvest IFQ species within specified limitations. Further information on the implementation of the IFQ Program, and the rationale supporting it, is contained in the

preamble to the final rule implementing the IFQ Program published in the Federal Register, November 9, 1993 (58 FR 59375) and subsequent amendments.

This announcement is consistent with 50 CFR 679.23(g)(1), which requires that directed fishing for sablefish managed under the IFQ program be specified by the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), and announced by publication in the Federal Register. This method of season announcement was selected to facilitate coordination between the sablefish season, chosen by the Regional Administrator, and the halibut season, chosen by the IPHC. The directed fishing season for sablefish with fixed gear managed under the IFQ program will open on 12:00 noon, A.l.t., March 15, 1997, and will close 12:00 noon, A.l.t., November 15, 1997. This period runs concurrently with the IFQ season for Pacific halibut announced by the IPHC. The IFQ halibut season was announced by publication in the Federal Register, March 18, 1997.

Classification

This action is taken under § 679.23(g)(1) and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 773 *et seq.* and 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: March 14, 1997.

Bruce Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries

National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 97-6965 Filed 3-14-97; 4:34 pm]

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50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 961107312-7012-02; I.D. 031297A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Offshore Component Pollock in the Aleutian Islands Subarea

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

ACTION: Modification of a closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is opening directed fishing for pollock by vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the Aleutian Islands subarea (AI) of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to fully utilize the total allowable catch (TAC) of pollock in that area.

EFFECTIVE DATE: 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 12, 1997, until 1200 hrs, A.l.t., March 14, 1997.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Patty Britza, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The groundfish fishery in the BSAI exclusive economic zone is managed by NMFS according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Fishing by U.S. vessels is governed by regulations implementing the FMP at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

In accordance with § 679.20(c)(3)(iii), the allowance for the pollock TAC apportioned for vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the AI was established by the Final 1997 Harvest Specifications for Groundfish (62 FR 7168, February 18, 1997) as 16,835 metric tons (mt). The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has established a directed fishing allowance of 14,835 mt, and set aside the remaining 2,000 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. The fishery for pollock by vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the AI of the BSAI was closed to directed fishing under § 679.20(d)(1)(iii) on February 27, 1997, in order to reserve amounts anticipated to be needed for incidental catch in other fisheries (62 FR 9379, March 3, 1997).

NMFS has determined that as of March 10, 1997, 5,257 mt remain in the directed fishing allowance. Therefore, NMFS is terminating the previous closure and is opening directed fishing for pollock by vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the AI of the BSAI effective 1200 hrs, A.l.t., March 12, 1997.

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator finds that this directed fishing allowance will soon be reached. Current information shows the catching capacity of vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component is in excess of 2,200 mt per day.

NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for pollock by vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the AI of the BSAI at 1200 hrs, A.l.t., March 14, 1997.

All other closures remain in full force and effect.

Classification

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: March 13, 1997.

Bruce Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 97-6966 Filed 3-14-97; 4:34 pm]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 961107312-7021-02; I.D. 031497C]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Atka Mackerel in the Central Aleutian District of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

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

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Atka mackerel in the Central Aleutian District of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the 1997 total allowable catch (TAC) of Atka mackerel in this area.

EFFECTIVE DATE: 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 15, 1997, until 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 1997.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Andrew Smoker, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The groundfish fishery in the BSAI exclusive economic zone is managed by NMFS according to the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area (FMP), prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Fishing by U.S. vessels is governed by regulations implementing the FMP at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

In accordance with § 679.20(c)(3)(iii), the TAC of Atka mackerel for the Central Aleutian District was established by the Final 1997 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the BSAI (62 FR 7168, February 18, 1997) as 19,500 metric tons (mt).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the TAC for Atka mackerel specified for the Central

Aleutian District will soon be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 18,500 mt and is setting aside the remaining 1,000 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. 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 Atka mackerel in the Central Aleutian District.

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

Classification

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: March 14, 1997.

Bruce Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 961126334-7025-02; I.D. 031497D]

Fisheries of the Economic Exclusive Zone Off Alaska; Deep-Water Species Fishery by Vessels Using Trawl 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 species that comprise the deep-water species fishery by vessels using trawl gear in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary because the first seasonal bycatch allowance of Pacific halibut apportioned to the deep-water species fishery in the GOA has been caught.

EFFECTIVE DATE: 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 15, 1997, until 1200 hrs, A.l.t., April 1, 1997.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Thomas Pearson, 907-486-6919.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone is managed by NMFS 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