

EFFECTIVE DATE: 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 11, 1997, until 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 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 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.

The final specification of the allocation of Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA was established by the Final 1997 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the GOA (62 FR 8179, February 24, 1997) as 31,457 metric tons (mt), determined in accordance with § 679.20(a)(6)(iii).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the allocation for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component in the Central Regulatory Area will soon be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 26,457 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 5,000 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 Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component in the Central Regulatory Area.

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

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR 679.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: March 10, 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. 031097B]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska, Pacific Cod in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska

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

ACTION: Apportionment of reserve; modification of closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is apportioning the reserves of Pacific cod and opening directed fishing for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component for 24 hours in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to allow for an opportunity to harvest the remaining total allowable catch (TAC) and to account for previous harvest of the TAC in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Opening 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 10, 1997, and closing 1200 hrs, A.l.t., March 11, 1997 until 2400 hrs, December 31, 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 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.

The initial total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA was established by the Final 1997 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the GOA (62 FR 8179, February 24, 1997) as 19,380 metric tons (mt). Directed fishing for Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA was closed on March 3, 1997, under § 679.20(a)(6)(iv)(C) and 679.20(d)(1)(iii) in order to prevent exceeding the initial TAC and to provide for amounts anticipated to be needed for incidental catch in other fisheries (62 FR 10222, March 6, 1997).

The reserve of Pacific cod in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA was created as a management buffer to

prevent exceeding the TAC and to provide greater assurance that Pacific cod could be retained as bycatch throughout the fishing year by the Final 1997 Harvest Specifications for Groundfish of the GOA (62 FR 8179, February 24, 1997).

The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, (Regional Administrator), has determined that the initial TAC for Pacific cod in the Western Regulatory Area needs to be supplemented from the Pacific cod reserve for that area in order to continue operations and account for prior harvest. Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(b)(2), NMFS is apportioning 4,845 mt of Pacific cod from the reserves to the TAC in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(6)(iii) the apportionment of the Pacific cod reserve in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA is allocated to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore and offshore components as 4,361 mt and 484 mt respectively. This action brings the total allocation of the 1997 Pacific cod TAC for vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore and offshore components to 21,803 mt and 2,422 mt, respectively.

NMFS has determined that as of March 6, 1997, 2,230 mt remain in the directed fishing allowance. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a new directed fishing allowance of 21,503 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 300 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries.

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Regional Administrator, has determined that the 1997 directed fishing allowance of Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA has not been reached. Therefore, NMFS is terminating the previous closure and is opening directed fishing for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA effective 1200 hrs, A.l.t., March 10, 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 Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component has recently averaged 1,400 mt per day, but is highly variable. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component in the Western Regulatory Area in the GOA effective 1200 hrs, A.l.t., March 11, 1997.

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

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR 679.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: March 10, 1997.

Gary C. Matlock,

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

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