

will be reached on or before October 12, 1997. Consequently, NMFS closes the directed fishery for the north Atlantic swordfish management unit effective October 12, 1997.

EFFECTIVE DATE: The closure is effective at 12 noon, local time, on October 12, 1997, through November 30, 1997.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jill Stevenson, 301-713-2347, or Buck Sutter, 813-570-5447.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The north Atlantic swordfish fishery is managed under the Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Swordfish and its implementing regulations at 50 CFR part 630 under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*) and the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (ATCA; 16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.*). Regulations issued under the authority of ATCA carry out the recommendations of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.

The regulations governing the Atlantic swordfish fisheries at § 630.24 provide for a specified annual quota to be landed by the directed fishery. The annual quota is divided into two semiannual quotas for each of the 6-month periods, June 1 through November 30, and December 1 through May 31. NMFS is required, under § 630.25(a)(1), to monitor the catch and landings statistics and, on the basis of these statistics, to project a date when the catch will equal the quota, and to publish a **Federal Register** document announcing the closure.

Closure of the Fishery

Reported landings of swordfish in the directed fishery in the first semiannual season totaled 594.7 metric tons dressed weight (mt dw) as of September 1, 1997. Average landings of swordfish during September and October from 1994 to 1996 were 306 mt and 334 mt, respectively. However, current landings are higher than during similar periods during the past 3 years. Accounting for anticipated delayed reporting (based on experience in the last semiannual season from December 1, 1996, through May 31, 1997) and the current higher than average rate of landings, it is expected that the first semiannual directed harvest quota of 1,064.4 mt dw for the directed fishery would be reached on or about October 12, 1997.

Therefore, NMFS announces that the directed fishery for swordfish will close at 12 noon, local time on October 12, 1997. All vessels must be in port and offloaded on or before this closing date. This notice provides considerably more

than the 14-day advance notice of closure required by regulation. To provide advance notice as early as possible, NMFS issued a notice to the industry on August 20, 1997, that, based on then current landings, a closure was anticipated about mid-October, 1997. This advance notice period will allow swordfish vessel owners to plan their fishing, offloading and sale of swordfish catch prior to the closure deadline.

During closure of the directed fishery, a person may not fish for swordfish from the north Atlantic stock, and no more than 15 swordfish, caught incidentally while fishing with longline gear for other species, may be possessed in the North Atlantic Ocean, including the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea, north of 5° N. lat., or landed in an Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, or Caribbean state. During this directed fishery closure, no swordfish may be retained or possessed on board a vessel using harpoon gear. Established swordfish bycatch limits for the non-directed fisheries remain unchanged (§ 630.25(d)).

The drift gillnet fishery is currently closed under emergency authority through November 26, 1997 (62 FR 30775, June 5, 1997). Pursuant to this emergency closure: (1) No one aboard a vessel using or having on board a drift gillnet may fish for swordfish from the north Atlantic swordfish stock; and (2) no more than two swordfish per trip may be possessed on board a vessel using or having on board a drift gillnet in the North Atlantic Ocean, including the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea, north of 5° N. lat., or landed in an Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, or Caribbean coastal state.

Classification

This action is taken under 50 CFR 630.24 and 50 CFR 630.25(a) and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: September 19, 1997.

Gary C. Matlock,

*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. 961126334-7025-02; I.D. 091997A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pollock in Statistical Area 620 of 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 pollock in Statistical Area 620 of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the 1997 total allowable catch (TAC) for pollock in this area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), September 21, 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 1997 TAC for pollock in Statistical Area 620 of the GOA was established as 31,250 metric tons (mt) by the Final 1997 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the GOA (62 FR 8179, February 24, 1997), determined in accordance with § 679.20(a) (5)(ii)(A).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the 1997 TAC for pollock in Statistical Area 620 will be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 31,050 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 200 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 has been reached. Consequently, NMFS is closing directed fishing for pollock in Statistical Area 620 of the GOA.

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

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. It must be implemented immediately to prevent overharvesting the 1997 TAC for pollock in Statistical Area 620 of the GOA. A delay in the effective date is impracticable and contrary to public

interest. The fleet has already taken the 1997 TAC for pollock in Statistical Area 620 of the GOA. Further delay would only result in overharvest which would disrupt the FMP's objective of providing sufficient pollock as bycatch to support other anticipated fisheries. NMFS finds for good cause that the implementation of this action cannot be delayed for 30 days. Accordingly, under 5 U.S.C. 553(d), a delay in the effective date is hereby waived.

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: September 19, 1997

Richard W. Surdi,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries National Marine Fisheries Service
[FR Doc. 97-25361 Filed 9-19-97; 4:41 pm]

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