

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 285

[I.D. 071098]

Atlantic Tuna Fisheries; Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Fishery

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

ACTION: Catch limit adjustment.

SUMMARY: NMFS adjusts the daily catch limit for the Angling category fishery for Atlantic Bluefin Tuna (BFT) in all areas to one fish from the large school or small medium size class per vessel. The intent of this action is to ensure reasonable fishing opportunities without risking overharvest of the quota established for the Angling category fishery.

DATES: Effective 1:00 a.m. local time on July 16, 1998, through December 31, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Sarah McLaughlin, 301-713-2347, or Mark Murray-Brown, 978-281-9260.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Regulations implemented under the authority of the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.*) governing the harvest of BFT by persons and vessels subject to U.S. jurisdiction are found at 50 CFR part 285.

Implementing regulations for the Atlantic tuna fisheries at § 285.24 allow for adjustments to the daily catch limits in order to provide for maximum utilization of the quota spread over the longest possible period of time. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA) may increase or reduce the per angler catch limit for any size class BFT or may change the per angler limit to a per boat limit or a per boat limit to a per angler limit.

NMFS previously adjusted the southern area (south of 38°47' N. lat.) daily catch limit to one fish per angler, with a maximum of three fish per vessel, from the school size class and one fish per vessel from the large school or small medium size class (63 FR 35161, June 29, 1998). The duration of the catch limit adjustment was specified as the period of June 26 through July 27, 1998. However, NMFS indicated that an interim closure or additional catch limit adjustment may be necessary to enhance scientific data collection from all geographic areas, and that such action would be announced through publication in the **Federal Register**.

Based on information collected by NMFS through dockside and telephone surveys and through the Automated Catch Reporting System (reported landings and estimated fishing effort), NMFS has determined that recent catch rates in the last few weeks are considerably higher than those for the same time period in 1997, which formed the basis for the previous catch limit adjustment. Therefore, NMFS has determined that an additional catch limit adjustment is warranted for all areas, i.e., north and south of 38°47' N. lat. The catch limit for all areas is adjusted as follows: No more than one BFT from the large school or small medium size class (measuring 47 to less than 73 inches) may be retained each day per Angling category vessel. This daily catch limit adjustment is effective July 16 through December 31, 1998, or until further notice.

Additional adjustments to the daily catch limit or closures, if any, shall be announced through publication in the **Federal Register**. In addition, anglers may call the Atlantic Tunas Information Line at 888-USA-TUNA (888-872-8862), 301-713-1279, or 978-281-9305 for updates on quota monitoring and catch limit adjustments.

Anglers aboard Charter/Headboat vessels, when engaged in recreational fishing for school, large school, and small medium BFT, are subject to the same rules as anglers aboard Angling category vessels. All BFT landed under the Angling category quota outside of North Carolina must be reported within 24 hours of landing to the NMFS Automated Catch Reporting System by phoning 888-USA-TUNA (888-872-8862), or in North Carolina, to a reporting station. For information about the North Carolina Harvest Tagging Program, including reporting station locations, call 800-338-7804.

The fishery for large medium and giant BFT (measuring 73 inches or greater) is not affected by this closure and remains open in all areas until further notice, subject to the trophy fish limit of one-per-vessel-per-year. Anglers should verify that the trophy category remains open by calling the Atlantic Tunas Information Line prior to each fishing trip. In addition, anglers may continue to tag and release BFT of all sizes under the NMFS tag-and-release program (50 CFR 285.27).

Classification

This action is taken under 50 CFR 285.24(d)(3) and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: July 10, 1998.

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. 971208297-8054-02; I.D. 071098D]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Ocean Perch in the Central Regulatory Area

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 Pacific ocean perch in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska management area (GOA). This action is necessary to fully utilize the 1998 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific ocean perch in this area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), July 12, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Andrew Smoker, 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.

In accordance with § 679.20(c)(3)(ii), the Final 1998 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the GOA (63 FR 12027, March 12, 1998) established the amount of the 1998 TAC of Pacific ocean perch in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska 6,600 metric tons (mt).

The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has established a directed fishing allowance of 5,600 mt, and set aside the remaining 1,000 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. The fishery for Pacific ocean perch in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA was closed to directed fishing under § 679.20(d)(1)(iii) on July 6, 1998, (63 FR 37071, July 9, 1998).

NMFS has determined that as of July 9, 1998, 2,000 mt remain in the directed fishing allowance. Therefore, NMFS is terminating the previous closure and is opening directed fishing for Pacific ocean perch in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.

Classification

All other closures remain in full force and effect. This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. It must be implemented immediately in order to allow full utilization of the Pacific ocean perch TAC. Providing prior notice and opportunity for public comment for this action is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. Further delay would only disrupt the FMP objective of providing the Pacific ocean perch TAC for harvest. 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 § 679.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: July 10, 1998.

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. 971208297-8054-02; I.D. 071098A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Ocean Perch in the Eastern Regulatory Area

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 Pacific ocean perch in the Eastern Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska management area (GOA). This action is necessary to fully utilize the 1998 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific ocean perch in this area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), July 12, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Andrew Smoker, 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.

In accordance with § 679.20(c)(3)(ii), the Final 1998 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the GOA (63 FR 12027, March 12, 1998) established the amount of the 1998 TAC of Pacific ocean perch in the Eastern Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska as 2,366 metric tons (mt).

The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has established a directed fishing allowance of 2,116 mt, and set aside the remaining 250 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. The fishery for Pacific ocean perch in the Eastern Regulatory Area of the GOA was closed to directed fishing under § 679.20(d)(1)(iii) on July 6, 1998, (63 FR 37071, July 9, 1998).

NMFS has determined that as of July 9, 1998, 1,900 mt remain in the directed fishing allowance. Therefore, NMFS is terminating the previous closure and is opening directed fishing for Pacific ocean perch in the Eastern Regulatory Area of the GOA.

Classification

All other closures remain in full force and effect. This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. It must be implemented immediately in order to allow full utilization of the Pacific ocean perch TAC. Providing prior notice and opportunity for public comment for this action is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. Further delay would only disrupt the FMP objective of providing the Pacific ocean perch TAC for harvest. 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 § 679.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: July 10, 1998.

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. 971208297-8054-02; I.D. 071098C]

Fisheries of the Economic Exclusive Zone Off Alaska; "Other Rockfish" Species Group in the Eastern Regulatory Area

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 the "other rockfish" species group in the Eastern Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to fully utilize the total allowable catch (TAC) of "other rockfish" in that area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), July 12, 1998, until 2400 hours, A.l.t., December 31, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Andrew Smoker, 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.

In accordance with § 679.20(c)(3)(ii), the Final 1998 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the GOA (63 FR 12027, March 12, 1998) established the amount of the 1998 TAC of "other rockfish" in the Eastern Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska as 1,500 metric tons (mt). The Final 1998 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the GOA also closed directed fishing for "other rockfish" in the Eastern Regulatory Area of the GOA (see § 679.20(d)(1)(iii)) in anticipation that the TAC would be needed as incidental catch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries during 1998.

The Regional Administrator has determined that the entire TAC for "other rockfish" will not be needed as incidental catch and is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 1,400 mt and is setting aside the remaining 100 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries.