

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 679**

Docket No. 011218304–1304–01; I.D. 030502C]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Catcher Processor Vessels Using Hook-and-line Gear in 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 Pacific cod by catcher processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the A season apportionment of the 2002 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod allocated for catcher processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in this area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 8, 2002, until 2400 hrs, A.l.t., August 15, 2002.

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

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI 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. 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 A season apportionment of the 2002 Pacific cod TAC allocated to catcher processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in the BSAI was established by an emergency rule implementing 2002 harvest specifications and associated management measures for the groundfish fisheries off Alaska (67 FR 956, January 8, 2002) as a directed fishing allowance of 45,048 metric tons. See § 679.20 (c)(3)(iii), § 679.20 (c)(5), and § 679.20 (a)(7)(i)(A)&(C).

In accordance with § 679.20 (d)(1)(iii), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the A season apportionment of the 2002 Pacific cod TAC allocated to catcher processor vessels using hook-and-line gear as a directed fishing allowance in the BSAI will soon be reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher processor vessels using hook-and-line gear in the BSAI.

Maximum retainable bycatch amounts 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. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, finds that the need to immediately implement this action to prevent exceeding the A season apportionment of the 2002 Pacific cod TAC allocated to catcher processor vessels using hook-and-line gear constitutes 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)(3)(B) and § 679.20 (b)(3)(iii)(A), as such procedures would be unnecessary and contrary to the public interest. Similarly, the need to implement these measures in a timely fashion to prevent exceeding the A season apportionment of the 2002 Pacific cod TAC allocated to catcher processor vessels using hook-and-line gear constitutes good cause to find that the effective date 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 Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: March 5, 2002.

Richard W. Surdi,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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