

on the first working day following January 1. Six vessels have registered with NMFS to fish in the A season HLA fisheries in areas 542 and/or 543. In order to reduce the amount of daily catch in the HLA by about half and to disperse the fishery over time and in accordance with § 679.20(a)(8)(iii)(B), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has randomly assigned each vessel to the HLA directed fishery for Atka mackerel for which they have registered and is now notifying each vessel of its assignment.

Vessels authorized to participate in the first HLA directed fishery in area 542 and/or the second HLA directed fishery in area 543 in accordance with § 679.20(a)(8)(iii) are as follows: Federal Fishery Permit number (FFP) 3819 Alaska Spirit, FFP 3400 Alaska Ranger, and FFP 2443 Alaska Juris.

Vessels authorized to participate in the first HLA directed fishery in area 543 and/or the second HLA directed fishery in area 542 in accordance with § 679.20(a)(8)(iii) are as follows: FFP 4093 Alaska Victory, FFP 3835 Seafisher, and FFP 3423 Alaska Warrior.

Classification

The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds 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)(B) as such requirement is unnecessary. This notice merely advises the owners of these vessels of the results of a random assignment required by regulation. The notice needs to occur immediately to notify the owner of each vessel of its assignment to allow these vessel owners to plan for participation in the A season HLA fisheries in area 542 and area 543.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by § 679.20 and 679.22 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: January 14, 2004.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 04-1218 Filed 1-20-04; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 031126297-3297-01; I.D. 011304D]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pollock in Statistical Area 630 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 630 of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the first seasonal allowance of the pollock interim total allowable catch (TAC) for Statistical Area 630 of the GOA.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), January 21, 2004, until superseded by the notice of Final 2004 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the GOA, which will be published in the *Federal Register*.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 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.

The first seasonal allowance of the pollock interim TAC in Statistical Area 630 of the GOA is 2,274 metric tons (mt) as established by the interim 2004 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (68 FR 67964, December 5, 2003).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the first seasonal allowance of the pollock interim TAC in Statistical Area 630 will soon be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 2,000 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 274 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 pollock in Statistical Area 630 of the GOA.

Maximum retainable 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, (AA), finds 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)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent the Agency from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the closure of the pollock fishery under the interim TAC in Statistical Area 630.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by section 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: January 14, 2004.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 04-1219 Filed 1-20-04; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 031126295-3295-01; I.D. 011304A]

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

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

ACTION: Closures and openings.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Atka mackerel with gears

other than jig in the Eastern Aleutian District (Statistical Area 541) and the Bering Sea subarea of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the interim 2004 total allowable catch (TAC) of Atka mackerel in these areas. NMFS is also announcing the opening and closure dates of the first and second directed fisheries within the harvest limit area (HLA) in Statistical Areas 542 and 543. These actions are necessary to prevent exceeding the HLA limits established for the Central (area 542) and Western (area 543) Aleutian Districts pursuant to the interim 2004 Atka mackerel TAC.

DATES: Prohibition of directed fishing for Atka mackerel with gears other than jig in the Eastern Aleutian District and the Bering Sea subarea is effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), January 22, 2004, until superseded by the notice of Final 2004 Harvest Specifications for Groundfish, which will be published in the **Federal Register**. The first directed fisheries in the HLA in area 542 and area 543 are open effective 1200 hrs, A.l.t., January 24, 2004. The first HLA fisheries in area 542 and 543 will remain open until 1200 hrs, A.l.t., February 2, 2004. The second directed fisheries in the HLA in area 542 and area 543 are open effective 1200 hrs, A.l.t., February 4, 2004. The second HLA fisheries in area 542 and 543 will remain open until 1200 hrs, A.l.t., February 13, 2004.

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

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI exclusive economic zone 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 interim Atka mackerel TAC for other gear in the Eastern Aleutian District and the Bering Sea subarea is 8,763 metric tons (mt) as established by the Interim 2004 Harvest Specifications for Groundfish (68 FR 68265, December 8, 2003). See §§679.20(c)(2)(ii) and 679.20(a)(8)(ii).

In accordance with §679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the interim other gear TAC for Atka mackerel in the Eastern Aleutian District and the Bering Sea subarea will be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 5,000 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 3,763 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 soon will be reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Atka mackerel in the Eastern Aleutian District and the Bering Sea subarea of the BSAI.

In accordance with §679.20(a)(8)(iii)(C), the Regional Administrator is opening the first directed fisheries for Atka mackerel within the HLA in areas 542 and 543, 48 hours after the closure of the area 541 Atka mackerel directed fishery. The Regional Administrator has established the opening date for the second HLA directed fisheries as 48 hours after the last closure of the first HLA fisheries in either 542 or 543. Consequently, NMFS is opening and closing directed fishing for Atka mackerel in the HLA of areas 542 and 543 in accordance with the periods listed under the DATES section of this notice.

In accordance with §679.20(a)(8)(iii), vessels using trawl gear for directed fishing for Atka mackerel have previously registered with NMFS to fish in the HLA fisheries in areas 542 and/or 543. NMFS has randomly assigned each vessel to the directed fishery or fisheries for which they have registered. NMFS has notified each vessel owner as to which fishery each vessel has been assigned by NMFS. That notification is published elsewhere in this issue.

In accordance with §679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(1), the HLA limit of the interim TAC in areas 542 and 543 are 7,321 mt and 5,097 mt respectively. Based on those limits and the proportion of the number of vessels in each fishery compared to the total number of vessels participating in the HLA directed fishery for area 542 or 543, the harvest limits for each HLA directed fishery in areas 542 and 543 are as follows: for the first directed fishery in area 542, 3,661 mt; for the first

directed fishery in area 543, 2,549 mt; for the second directed fishery in area 542, 3,660 mt; and for the second directed fishery in area 543, 2,548 mt. In accordance with §679.20(a)(8)(iii)(E), the Regional Administrator has established the closure dates of the Atka mackerel directed fisheries in the HLA for areas 542 and 543 based on the amount of the harvest limit and the estimated fishing capacity of the vessels assigned to the respective fisheries. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Atka mackerel in the HLA of areas 542 and 543 in accordance with the dates and times listed under the DATES section of this notice.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, (AA), finds 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)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent the Agency from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the closure of the fishery under the 2004 interim TAC of Atka mackerel in the Eastern Aleutian District and the Bering Sea subarea and the opening and closures of the fisheries for the HLA limits established for the Central (area 542) and Western (area 543) Aleutian Districts pursuant to the interim 2004 Atka mackerel TAC.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

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: January 14, 2004.

Bruce C. Morehead,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 04-1217 Filed 1-20-04; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S