

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

[Docket No. 141021887–5172–02]

RIN 0648–XE203

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Reallocation of Pacific Cod in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; reallocation.

SUMMARY: NMFS is reallocating the projected unused amounts of Pacific cod from catcher vessels greater than 60 feet (18.3 meters (m)) length overall (LOA) using pot gear and catcher vessels using trawl gear to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 meters) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear, Amendment 80 (A80) catcher processors (C/Ps), American Fisheries Act (AFA) trawl C/Ps, and C/Ps using pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area. This action is necessary to allow the 2015 total allowable catch of Pacific cod to be harvested.

DATES: Effective September 17, 2015, through 2400 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), December 31, 2015.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 907–586–7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management 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 2015 Pacific cod TAC specified for catcher vessels greater than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using pot gear in the BSAI is 18,641 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2015 and 2016 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (80 FR 11919, March 5, 2015). The Regional Administrator has determined that catcher vessels greater than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using pot gear in the BSAI will not be able to harvest 1,000 mt of the remaining 2015 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(7)(ii)(A)(5).

The 2015 Pacific cod TAC specified for catcher vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI is 49,224 mt as established by the final 2015 and 2016 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (80 FR 11919, March 5, 2015). The Regional Administrator has determined that catcher vessels using trawl gear will not be able to harvest 6,000 mt of the remaining 2015 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(7)(ii)(A)(9).

Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(a)(7)(iii)(A) and § 679.20(a)(7)(iii)(B), NMFS reallocates 7,000 mt of Pacific cod to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 meters) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear, A80 C/Ps, AFA trawl C/Ps, and C/Ps using pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area.

The harvest specifications for Pacific cod included in the final 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (80 FR 11919, March 5, 2015 and 80 FR 51757, August 26, 2015) are revised as follows: 17,641 mt for catcher vessels greater than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using pot gear, 43,224 mt for catcher vessels using trawl gear, 12,380 mt for catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear, 30,846 mt to A80 C/Ps, 5,623 mt to AFA trawl C/Ps, and 4,329 mt for C/Ps using pot gear.

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 NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the reallocation of Pacific cod specified from the trawl catcher vessel sector to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 meters) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear, AFA C/Ps, A80 C/Ps, and C/Ps using pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area. Since these fisheries are currently open, it is important to immediately inform the industry as to the revised allocations. Immediate notification is necessary to allow for the orderly conduct and efficient operation of this fishery, to allow the industry to plan for the fishing season, and to avoid potential disruption to the fishing fleet as well as processors. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of September 15, 2015.

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: September 17, 2015.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

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

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