

utilization of the pollock TAC, and therefore reduce the public's ability to use and enjoy the fishery resource.

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 taken under 50 CFR 679.20, and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: September 29, 2003.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 03-25264 Filed 10-1-03; 2:46 pm]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 021212306-2306-01; I.D. 093003B]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Vessels Catching Pacific Cod for Processing by the Offshore Component in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska

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

ACTION: Inseason adjustment; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS issues an inseason adjustment closing the fishery for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the 2003 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component of the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.

DATES: Effective 2400 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), October 1, 2003, until 2400 hrs A.l.t., December 31, 2003. Comments must be received at the following address no later than 4:30 p.m., A.l.t., October 16, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Comments may be mailed to Sue Salvesson, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668,

Attn: Lori Durall. Comments also may be sent via facsimile (fax) to 907 586 7557. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or Internet. Courier or hand delivery of comments may be made to NMFS in the Federal Building, Room 453, Juneau, AK 99801.

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.

The 2003 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA is 2,269 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2003 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (68 FR 9924, March 3, 2003)

As of September 20, 2003, 812 mt of Pacific cod remain in the 2003 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area. Regulations at § 679.23(b) specify that the time of all openings and closures of fishing seasons other than the beginning and end of the calendar fishing year is 1200 hrs, A.l.t. The fifth seasonal allowance of halibut mortality for trawl gear in the Gulf of Alaska becomes available at 1200 hrs, A.l.t., October 1, 2003. Vessels using trawl gear for catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area will be able to begin directed fishing for Pacific cod at that time. Current information shows the catching capacity of trawl vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA is about 1,500 mt per day. The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined that the TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA could be exceeded if a 24-hour fishery were allowed to occur. NMFS intends that the TAC not be exceeded and, therefore, will not allow the fishery to close at 12:00 hrs on October 2, 2003. NMFS, in accordance with § 679.25(a)(1)(i), and § 679.25(a)(2)(i), is adjusting the 2003 fishing season for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific

cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA by closing the fishery at 24:00 hrs, A.l.t., October 1, 2003, at which time directed fishing for Pacific cod by vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA will be prohibited.

NMFS is taking this action to allow a controlled fishery to occur, thereby preventing the overharvest of the 2003 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA. In accordance with § 679.25(a)(2)(iii), NMFS has determined that prohibiting directed fishing at 2400 hrs, A.l.t., October 1, 2003, is the least restrictive management adjustment to achieve the 2003 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA. Pursuant to § 679.25(b)(2), NMFS has considered data regarding catch per unit of effort and rate of harvest in making this adjustment.

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 contrary to the public interest. This requirement is contrary to the public interest as it would delay the closure of the fishery, not allow the full utilization of the Pacific cod TAC, and therefore reduce the public's ability to use and enjoy the fishery resource.

The AA for Fisheries, NOAA, 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.

Without this inseason adjustment, NMFS could not allow the remaining 2003 TAC of Pacific cod apportioned to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component in the Central Regulatory Area to be harvested in an expedient manner and in accordance with the regulatory schedule. Under § 679.25(c)(2), interested persons are invited to submit written comments on this action to the above address until October 16, 2003.

This action is required by §§ 679.20 and 679.25 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.