

SUMMARY: NMFS announces closure of the 2003 catcher/processor fishery for Pacific whiting (whiting) at noon local time (l.t.) October 24, 2003, because the allocation for the catcher/processor sector will be reached by that time. This action is intended to keep the harvest of whiting within the 2003 allocation levels.

DATES: Effective from noon l.t. October 24, 2003, until the start of the 2004 primary season for the catcher/processor sector, unless modified, superseded or rescinded. Comments will be accepted through November 13, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments to D. Robert Lohn, Administrator, Northwest Region, NMFS, 7600 Sand Point Way NE., Seattle, WA 98115-0070; or Rod McInnis, Acting Regional Administrator, Southwest Region, NMFS, 501 West Ocean Blvd., Suite 4200, Long Beach, CA 90802-4213.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Becky Renko at 206-526-6110

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This action is authorized by regulations implementing the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP), which governs the groundfish fishery off Washington, Oregon, and California. On March 7, 2003 (68 FR 11182), the levels of allowable biological catch (ABC), the optimum yield (OY) and the commercial OY (the OY minus the tribal allocation) for U.S. harvests of whiting were announced in the **Federal Register**. For 2003 the whiting ABC is 188,000 metric tons (mt), the OY is 148,200 mt and the commercial OY is 121,200 mt. On June 16, 2003 (68 FR 35575) a subsequent **Federal Register** notice was published to correct an error in the allocation for the catcher processor and mothership sectors of the whiting fishery.

Regulations at 50 CFR 660.323(a)(4) divide the commercial OY into separate allocations for the non-tribal catcher/

processor, mothership, and shore-based sectors of the whiting fishery. The catcher/processor sector is composed of vessels that harvest and process whiting. The mothership sector is composed of mothership, and catcher vessels that harvest whiting for delivery to motherships. Motherships are vessels that process, but do not harvest. The shoreside sector is composed of vessels that harvest whiting for delivery to shoreside processors. Each of these sectors receives a portion of the commercial OY. In 2003, the catcher/processors received 34 percent, motherships received 24 percent, and the shore-based sector received 42 percent. When applied to the commercial OY for 2003, these percentage allowances of the whiting resulted in the following allocations OY: 41,208 mt for the catcher/processors, 29,088 mt for the motherships, and 50,904 mt for the shore-based sector.

Regulations at 50 CFR 660.323(a)(3)(i) describe the primary season for catcher/processors as the period(s) when at-sea processing is allowed and the fishery is open for the catcher/processor sector. When each sector's allocation is reached, the primary season for that sector is ended.

NMFS Action

This action announces achievement of the allocation for the catcher/processor sector only. The best available information on October 23, 2003, indicated that the 41,208 mt catcher/processor allocation would be reached by noon l.t. October 24, 2003, at which time the primary season for the catcher/processor sector ends.

For the reasons stated here and in accordance with the regulations at 50 CFR 660.323(a)(4)(iii)(A), NMFS herein announces: Effective noon l.t. October 24, 2003, further taking and retaining, receiving or at-sea processing of whiting by a catcher/processor is prohibited. No

additional unprocessed whiting may be brought on board after at-sea processing is prohibited, but a catcher/processor may continue to process whiting that was on board before at-sea processing was prohibited.

Classification

This action is authorized by the regulations implementing the FMP. The determination to take this action is based on the most recent data available. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NMFS, finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for comment on this action pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553 (b)(B), because providing prior notice and opportunity would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest. It would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest because if this closure were delayed in order to provide notice and comment, the fishery would be expected to greatly exceed the sector allocation. A delay to provide a cooling off period also would be expected to cause the fishery to exceed its allocation. Therefore, good cause also exists to waive the 30-day delay in effectiveness requirement of 5 U.S.C. 553 (d)(3). The aggregate data upon which the determination is based are available for public inspection at the Office of the Regional Administrator (see **ADDRESSES**) during business hours. This action is taken under the authority of 50 CFR 660.323(a)(4)(iii)(A) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: October 10, 2003.

Bruce C. Morehead,

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

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