

TACs usually are set at or below the acceptable biological catch (ABC) limits, which are below the overfishing levels (OFLs) for each target species or species group. The other species complex does not have an OFL or ABC limit due to the lack of stock assessment information for most of the species in the complex.

In 2003, a directed fishery for skates rapidly developed in the GOA. The 2003 skates harvest was 3,042 metric tons (mt) compared to 782 mt of skates harvested in 2002. Because skates are managed within the other species complex, the full TAC for the other species complex is available for a directed fishery for skates.

To reduce the potential for overfishing, the Council recommended that skates be managed as a target species. As a target species, OFL, ABC, and TAC amounts for skates would be established by annual harvest

specifications, allowing for more effective management of skates based on the best available scientific information. The development of OFL, ABC, and TAC amounts for the 2004 harvest specifications for skates would be based on scientific survey and harvest information from 2003 and prior years. Managing a directed fishery for skates so that OFL, ABC, and TAC amounts are not exceeded would reduce the potential for overfishing and would meet the conservation objectives of the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

Public comments are being solicited on proposed Amendment 63 through the end of the comment period stated (see DATES). A proposed rule that would implement the amendment may be published in the **Federal Register** for public comment at a later date. Public comments on the proposed rule must be received by the end of the comment

period on the amendment in order to be considered in the approval/disapproval decision on the amendment. All comments received by the end of the comment period on the amendment, whether specifically directed to the amendment or to the proposed rule, will be considered in the approval/disapproval decision. Comments received after that date will not be considered in the approval/disapproval decision on the amendment. To be considered, comments must be received not just postmarked or otherwise transmitted by close of business on the last day of the comment period.

Dated: November 25, 2003.

Bruce C. Morehead,

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