

IFRA) prepared for this action, the final 2002 Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report, dated November 2002, and the final 2003 SAFE report, dated November 2003, is available from the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, 605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306, Anchorage, AK 99501-2252, telephone (907) 271-2809 or from its homepage at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc>.

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Federal regulations at 50 CFR part 679 implementing the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Groundfish of the GOA govern the groundfish fisheries in the GOA. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) prepared the FMP, and NMFS approved it under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). General regulations that also pertain to the U.S. fisheries appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600.

The Council met in October 2003 to review scientific information concerning groundfish stocks including the 2002 SAFE report and the EA (see **ADDRESSES**) and recommended proposed 2004 specifications. The Council recommended and NMFS proposed a total acceptable biological catch (ABC) of 409,690 mt and a TAC of 227,797 mt for the 2004 fishing year. The proposed TAC amounts for each species were based on the best available

biological and socioeconomic information.

Under § 679.20(c)(1)(ii), NMFS published in the **Federal Register** proposed harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA for the 2004 fishing year published elsewhere in this issue. That document contains a detailed discussion of the proposed 2004 TACs, groundfish reserves, apportionments of TAC, ABC amounts, overfishing levels (OFLs), PSC amounts and apportionments, of the GOA groundfish fishery.

This action provides interim harvest specifications and apportionments thereof for the 2004 fishing year that will become available on January 1, 2004, and remain in effect until superseded by the final 2004 harvest specifications. Background information concerning the 2004 groundfish harvest specification process, on which this interim action is based, is provided in the above mentioned proposed specification document.

Establishment of Interim TACs

Regulations at § 679.20(c)(2)(i) require that one-fourth of each proposed TAC and apportionment thereof (not including the reserves and the first seasonal allowance of pollock and Pacific cod) and one-fourth of the halibut PSC amounts become effective at 0001 hours, A.l.t., January 1, on an interim basis and remain in effect until superseded by the final harvest specifications. As stated in the proposed specifications publication published elsewhere in this issue, no harvest of groundfish is authorized before the

effective date of this action implementing the interim specifications.

Regulations at § 679.20(a)(6)(i) and (ii) allocate 100 percent of the pollock TAC to vessels catching pollock for processing by the inshore component, 90 percent of the Pacific cod TAC to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component and 10 percent to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the offshore component.

The reserves for the GOA are 20 percent of the TAC amounts for pollock, Pacific cod, flatfish species, and the "other species" category (§ 679.20(b)(2)). The GOA groundfish TAC amounts have been utilized fully since 1987, and NMFS expects this trend to continue in 2004. Therefore, NMFS has proposed reapportioning all the reserves to the TAC. The interim TAC amounts contained in Table 1 reflect the reapportionment of reserves to the TAC.

Interim 2004 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications and Apportionments

Table 1 provides interim TAC amounts, the first seasonal allowance of pollock in the combined Western and Central Regulatory Areas, the first seasonal allowance of Pacific cod in the Western and Central Regulatory Areas, interim TAC allocations of Pacific cod to the inshore and offshore components, and interim sablefish TAC apportionments to hook-and-line and trawl gear. These interim TAC amounts and apportionments become effective at 0001 hours, A.l.t., January 1, 2004.

TABLE 1.—INTERIM 2004 TAC AMOUNTS OF GROUNDFISH FOR THE COMBINED WESTERN/CENTRAL (W/C), WESTERN (W), CENTRAL (C), AND EASTERN (E) REGULATORY AREAS AND IN THE WEST YAKUTAT (WYK), SOUTHEAST OUTSIDE (SEO), AND GULFWIDE (GW) DISTRICTS OF THE GULF OF ALASKA (GOA) ^{1,2}

[The first seasonal allowances of pollock in the Combined W/C Regulatory Areas, the first seasonal allowances of Pacific cod. Interim sablefish TAC apportionments to hook-and-line (H/L) and trawl (TRW) gear. Interim TAC amounts have been rounded to nearest metric tons]

Species	Area	Interim TAC	Total
Pollock ^{3,4}	W (610)	2,894	
	C (620)	6,535	
	C (630)	2,274	
	Subtotal		11,703
	W/C		
	WYK (640)	270	
	SEO (650)	1,615	
Total			13,588
Pacific cod ⁵	Inshore W	7,553	
	Offshore W	839	
	Inshore C	10,916	
	Offshore C	1,213	
	Inshore E	587	
	Offshore E	65	
	Total		21,173
Flatfish, Deep-water ⁶	W	45	
	C	555	