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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 121018563-3418-02]

RIN 0648-XC687

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Alaska Plaice 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; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting retention of Alaska plaice in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary because the 2013 initial total allowable catch (ITAC) of Alaska plaice in the BSAI has been reached.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), May 15, 2013, through 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2013.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steve Whitney, 907-586-7269.

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 2013 ITAC Alaska plaice in the BSAI is 17,000 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2013 and 2014 final harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (78 FR 13813, March 1, 2013).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(2), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the 2013 ITAC of Alaska plaice in the BSAI has been reached. Therefore, NMFS is requiring that Alaska plaice caught in the BSAI be treated as prohibited species in accordance with § 679.21(b).

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 prohibiting the retention of Alaska plaice in the BSAI. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of May 10, 2013.

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 § 679.21 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: May 15, 2013.

Kara Meckley,
Acting Deputy Director,
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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