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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 161020985-7181-02]

RIN 0648-XF675

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod 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; modification of a closure; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS is opening directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher vessels less than 6feet (18.3 meters) length overall (LOA) using hook-and-line or pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (BSAI). This action is necessary to fully use the 2017 total allowable catch of Pacific cod allocated to catcher vessels less than 60 feet LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), September 1, 2017, through 2400 hours, A.l.t., December 31, 2017. Comments must be received at the following address no later than 4:30 p.m., A.l.t., *[insert date 15 days after date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER]*.

ADDRESSES: Submit your comments, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2016-0140, by either of the following methods:

- *Federal e-Rulemaking Portal*. Go to www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2016-0140, click the “Comment Now!” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.
- Mail: Submit written comments to Glenn Merrill, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Mail comments to P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668.

Instructions: NMFS may not consider comments if they are sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the comment period ends. All comments received are a part of the public record and NMFS will post the comments for public viewing on www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender is publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter “N/A” in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Obren Davis, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (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.

NMFS closed directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher vessels less than 60 feet LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI under § 679.20(d)(1)(iii) on February 7, 2017 (82 FR 9530, February 7, 2017).

NMFS has determined that as of August 30, 2017, approximately 1,175 metric tons of Pacific cod remain in the 2017 Pacific cod apportionment for catcher vessels less than 60 feet LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI. Therefore, in accordance with § 679.25(a)(1)(i), (a)(2)(i)(C), and (a)(2)(iii)(D), and to fully use the 2017 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod in the BSAI, NMFS is terminating the previous closure and is opening directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher vessels less than 60 feet LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI. The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, (Regional Administrator) considered the following factors in reaching this decision: (1) the current catch of Pacific cod by catcher vessels less than 60 feet LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI and, (2) the harvest capacity and stated intent on future harvesting patterns of vessels in participating in this fishery.

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 the opening of directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher vessels less than 60 feet LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI. Immediate notification is necessary to allow for the orderly conduct and efficient operation of this fishery, to allow the industry to plan for the fishing season, and to avoid potential disruption to the fishing fleet and processors. NMFS was unable to

publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of August 30, 2017.

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.

Without this inseason adjustment, NMFS could not allow the fishery for Pacific cod by catcher vessels less than 60 feet LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI 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 *[INSERT DATE 15 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]*.

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

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

Dated: August 31, 2017.

Alan D. Risenhoover,
Director,
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.