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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 170816769-8162-02 and 170817779-8161-02]

RIN 0648-XG019

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Sablefish Managed Under the Individual Fishing Quota Program

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; opening.

SUMMARY: NMFS is opening directed fishing for sablefish with fixed gear managed under the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program and the Community Development Quota (CDQ) Program. The season will open 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 24, 2018, and will close 1200 hours, A.l.t., November 7, 2018. This period is the same as the 2018 commercial halibut fishery opening dates adopted by the International Pacific Halibut Commission. The IFQ and CDQ halibut season is specified by a separate publication in the *Federal Register* of annual management measures.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, A.l.t., March 24, 2018, until 1200 hours, A.l.t., November 7, 2018.

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

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Beginning in 1995, fishing for Pacific halibut and sablefish with fixed gear in the IFQ regulatory areas defined in 50 CFR 679.2 has been managed

under the IFQ Program. The IFQ Program is a regulatory regime designed to promote the conservation and management of these fisheries and to further the objectives of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the Northern Pacific Halibut Act. Persons holding quota share receive an annual allocation of IFQ. Persons receiving an annual allocation of IFQ are authorized to harvest IFQ species within specified limitations. Further information on the implementation of the IFQ Program, and the rationale supporting it, are contained in the preamble to the final rule implementing the IFQ Program published in the *Federal Register*, November 9, 1993 (58 FR 59375) and subsequent amendments.

This announcement is consistent with § 679.23(g)(1), which requires that the directed fishing season for sablefish managed under the IFQ Program be specified by the Administrator, Alaska Region, and announced by publication in the *Federal Register*. This method of season announcement was selected to facilitate coordination between the sablefish season, chosen by the Administrator, Alaska Region, and the halibut season, adopted by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC). The directed fishing season for sablefish with fixed gear managed under the IFQ Program will open 1200 hours, A.l.t., March 24, 2018, and will close 1200 hours, A.l.t., November 7, 2018. This period runs concurrently with the IFQ season for Pacific halibut announced by the IPHC. The IFQ halibut season will be specified by a separate publication in the *Federal Register* of annual management measures pursuant to 50 CFR 300.62.

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 the sablefish fishery thereby increasing bycatch and regulatory discards between the sablefish fishery and the halibut fishery, and preventing the accomplishment of the management objective for simultaneous opening of these two fisheries. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of March 7, 2018.

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

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

Dated: March 8, 2018.

Emily H. Menashes,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.