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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 180831813-9170-02]

RIN 0648-XY035

**Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone off Alaska; Sablefish in the Western
Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska**

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting retention of sablefish by vessels using trawl gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary because the 2019 total allowable catch of sablefish allocated to vessels using trawl gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA has been reached.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), September 13, 2019, through 2400 hours, A.l.t., December 31, 2019.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 907-586-7228.

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 2019 total allowable catch (TAC) of sablefish allocated to vessels using trawl gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA is 316 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2019 and 2020 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (84 FR 9416, March 14, 2019).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(2), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the 2019 TAC of sablefish allocated to vessels using trawl gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA will be reached. Therefore, NMFS is requiring that sablefish caught by vessels using trawl gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA be treated as prohibited species in accordance with § 679.21(a).

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 sablefish by vessels using trawl gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of September 12, 2019.

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: September 13, 2019.

Jennifer M. Wallace,
Acting Director,
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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