

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone is managed by NMFS 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 Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Fishing by U.S. vessels is governed by regulations implementing the FMP at 50 CFR parts 620 and 672.

In accordance with § 672.20(c)(1)(ii), the TAC for the shortraker/rougheye rockfish species group in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA was established by the Final 1995 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish (60 FR 8470, February 14, 1995), as 1,210 metric tons.

The Director, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined, in accordance with § 672.20(c)(3), that the TAC for the shortraker/rougheye rockfish species group in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA has been reached. Therefore, NMFS is requiring that further catches of the shortraker/rougheye rockfish species group in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA be treated as prohibited species in accordance with § 672.20(e).

Classification

This action is taken under 50 CFR 672.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: September 25, 1995.

Richard W. Surdi,

Acting Director, Office of Fisheries Conservation and Management, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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50 CFR Part 672

[Docket No. 950206041-5041-01; I.D. 091995C]

Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska; Pollock in Statistical Area 63 of the Gulf of Alaska

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

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for pollock in Statistical Area 63 in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the fourth quarterly allowance of the total allowable catch (TAC) for pollock in this area.

EFFECTIVE DATE: 12 noon, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), October 4, 1995, until 12 midnight, A.l.t., December 31, 1995.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Thomas Pearson, 907-486-6919.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone is managed by NMFS 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 Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Fishing by U.S. vessels is governed by regulations implementing the FMP at 50 CFR parts 620 and 672.

The 1995 pollock TAC in Statistical Area 63 was established by the Final 1995 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish (60 FR 8470, February 14, 1995) as 16,310 metric tons (mt), determined in accordance with § 672.20(a)(2)(iv). As of September 2, 1995, the remaining pollock TAC for Statistical Area 63 is 3,392 mt. The fourth quarterly allowance of the TAC for Statistical Area 63 will become available at noon, October 1, 1995, pursuant to § 672.20(a)(2)(iv).

The Director, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Director), has determined, in accordance with § 672.20(c)(2)(ii), that the fourth quarterly allowance of pollock TAC in Statistical Area 63 soon will be reached. Therefore, the Regional Director has established a directed fishing allowance of 2,984 mt after determining that 408 mt will be taken as incidental catch in directed fishing for other species in Statistical Area 63 of the GOA. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for pollock in Statistical Area 63, effective from 12 noon, A.l.t., October 4, 1995, until 12 midnight, A.l.t., December 31, 1994.

After the effective date of this closure, the maximum retainable bycatch amounts at § 672.20(g) apply at any time during a fishing trip.

Classification

This action is taken under 50 CFR 672.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: September 25, 1995.

Richard W. Surdi,

Acting Director, Office of Fisheries Conservation and Management, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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50 CFR Part 675

[Docket No. 950206040-5040-01; I.D. 081595B]

Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area; Change in Assumed Pacific Halibut Discard Mortality Rate

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

ACTION: Change in assumed Pacific halibut discard mortality rate.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces a reduction of the Pacific halibut discard mortality rate assumed for the 1995 hook-and-line Pacific cod fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI) from 12.5 percent to 11.5 percent. This action is necessary to implement the intent of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) to assess discard mortality rates observed in this fishery during the first half of 1995 and, if warranted, adjust the 12.5 assumed rate specified for this fishery to reflect more closely the 1995 observed rate.

EFFECTIVE DATE: September 28, 1995.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Susan Salvesson, NMFS, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

NMFS, in consultation with the Council, annually establishes Pacific halibut bycatch allowances for specified BSAI groundfish fisheries (§ 675.21(b)). The Director, NMFS, Alaska Region, monitors each fishery's halibut bycatch allowance using assumed discard mortality rates that are based on the best information available. NMFS published the 1995 halibut bycatch mortality allowances and assumed discard mortality rates in the Federal Register on February 14, 1995 (60 FR 8479), as part of the final 1995 specifications of groundfish and associated management measures.

On August 22, 1995, NMFS published in the Federal Register a proposed change to the halibut discard mortality rate specified for the 1995 Pacific cod hook-and-line gear fishery (60 FR 43579). Comments on the proposed change were invited through September 5, 1995.

The proposed action was based on the results of a mid-year analysis of 1995 observed halibut discard mortality rates that was conducted by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC). The results of this analysis indicated that a halibut discard rate of 11.5 percent is

more appropriate in estimating halibut bycatch mortality for the 1995 BSAI hook-and-line gear fishery for Pacific cod than the 12.5 percent rate established in the final 1995 groundfish specifications (February 14, 1995, 60 FR 8479).

At its June 1995 meeting, the Council reviewed the IPHC's analysis and recommended that NMFS take appropriate action to reduce the halibut discard mortality rate specified for the BSAI Pacific cod hook-and-line gear fishery. A fuller discussion of the IPHC's analysis and justification for the proposed reduction in this discard mortality rate assumption was presented in the August 22, 1995, Federal Register publication of the proposed change.

Upon reviewing the reasons for the proposed change to the halibut discard mortality rate specified for the BSAI Pacific cod fishery and public comments received on this action, NMFS revises Table 9 of the final 1995 groundfish specifications published February 14, 1995 (60 FR 8479), as follows:

TABLE 9.—ASSUMED PACIFIC HALIBUT MORTALITY RATES FOR THE BSAI FISHERIES DURING 1995

| | Assumed mortality (percent) |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Hook-and-Line Gear Fisheries: | |
| Rockfish | 24.0 |
| Pacific cod | 11.5 |
| Greenland turbot | 19.0 |
| Sablefish | 17.0 |
| Trawl Gear Fisheries: | |
| Midwater pollock | 89.0 |
| Non-pelagic pollock | 77.0 |
| Yellowfin sole | 76.0 |
| Rock sole, flathead sole, other flatfish | 75.0 |
| Rockfish | 69.0 |
| Pacific cod | 65.0 |
| Atka mackerel | 59.0 |
| Arrowtooth | 49.0 |
| Greenland Turbot | 48.0 |
| Pot Gear Fisheries: | |
| Pacific cod | 8.0 |

NMFS will recalculate the 1995 halibut bycatch mortality for the BSAI Pacific cod hook-and-line gear fishery using the 11.5 percent assumed discard mortality rate.

Response to Comments

One letter was received within the comment period that ended September

5, 1995. A summary of comments of the proposed action and NMFS's response follows.

Comment. An adjustment of the halibut discard mortality rate assumption for the BSAI Pacific cod hook-and-line gear fishery from 12.5 percent to 11.5 percent is appropriate based on the IPHC analysis of 1995 observer data. This action would encourage industry pursuit of further conservation efforts to reduce halibut mortality in the hook-and-line gear fisheries.

Response. NMFS concurs and has adjusted the halibut discard mortality rate specified for the BSAI Pacific cod hook-and-line gear fishery accordingly.

Classification

This action is authorized under 50 CFR 675.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: September 22, 1995.

Richard W. Surdi,

Acting Director, Office of Fisheries Conservation and Management, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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