

could result in industry's exceeding these allocations.

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: February 7, 1995.

David S. Crestin,

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

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50 CFR Parts 611, 675, and 676

[Docket No. 950206040-5040-01; I.D. 111494A]

Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands; Foreign Fishing; Limited Access Management of Federal Fisheries In and Off of Alaska; Final 1995 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish

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

ACTION: Final 1995 specifications of groundfish and associated management measures; final rule; technical amendment; closures.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces final 1995 harvest specifications of total allowable catches (TACs), initial apportionments of TACs for each category of groundfish, and associated management measures in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to establish harvest limits and associated management measures for groundfish during the 1995 fishing year. In addition, this action implements a technical amendment to update a directed fishery standard and the definition of a fishery category to reflect a change in a BSAI TAC category that resulted from the annual specification process. The technical amendment is necessary to incorporate a change in a groundfish TAC category to accommodate other regulations that limit bycatch amounts of prohibited species or groundfish species closed to directed fishing. NMFS also is closing specified fisheries consistent with the final 1995 groundfish specifications and fishery bycatch allowances of prohibited species. These measures are intended to conserve and manage the groundfish resources in the BSAI.

EFFECTIVE DATE: The final 1995 harvest specifications are effective on February

8, 1995, through 2400 Alaska local time (A.l.t.) on December 31, 1995, or until changed by subsequent notification in the **Federal Register**. The closures to directed fishing are effective on February 8, 1995, through 2400 A.l.t., December 31, 1995. The amendments to §§ 675.20 and 675.21 are effective on February 8, 1995.

ADDRESSES: Comments on directed fishing closures should be sent to Ronald J. Berg, Chief, Fisheries Management Division, Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668 (Attn: Lori Gravel). The final Environmental Assessment prepared for the 1995 Total Allowable Catch Specifications may be obtained from the same address, or by calling 907-586-7229. The final Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report is available from the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, P.O. Box 103136, Anchorage, AK 99510 (907-271-2809).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ellen R. Varosi, NMFS, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Groundfish fisheries in the BSAI are governed by Federal regulations at 50 CFR part 675 that implement the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Island area (FMP). Other applicable regulations are found at 50 CFR 611.93 (foreign fishing) and 50 CFR part 676 (Limited Access Management of Federal Fisheries In and Off of Alaska). The FMP was prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and approved by NMFS under the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

The FMP and implementing regulations require NMFS, after consultation with the Council, to specify annually the apportionments of prohibited species catch (PSC) limits among fisheries and seasons (§ 675.21(b)), the TAC, initial TAC (ITAC), initial domestic annual harvest (DAH), and initial total allowable level of foreign fishing (TALFF) for each target species and the "other species" category (§ 675.20(a)(2)). The sum of the TACs must be within the optimum yield (OY) range of 1.4 million to 2.0 million metric tons (mt) (§ 675.20(a)(2)). Specifications set forth in Tables 1-9 of this action satisfy these requirements. For 1995, the sum of TACs is 2,000,000 mt.

The proposed BSAI groundfish specifications and specifications for prohibited species bycatch allowances for the groundfish fishery of the BSAI

were published in the **Federal Register** on December 14, 1994 (59 FR 64383). Comments were invited through January 9, 1995. No written comments were received within the comment period. Public consultation with the Council occurred during the Council meeting in Anchorage, AK, held on December 5-10, 1994. Council recommendations and biological and economic data that were available at the Council's December meeting were considered in implementing the final 1995 specifications.

Interim Specifications

Regulations under § 675.20(a)(7)(i) authorize one-fourth of each proposed ITAC and apportionment thereof, one-fourth of each PSC allowance, and the first proposed seasonal allowance of pollock to be in effect on January 1 on an interim basis and to remain in effect until superseded by final initial specifications. NMFS published the interim 1995 specifications in the **Federal Register** on December 14, 1994 (59 FR 64346) and corrected January 30, 1995 (60 FR 5762). The final 1995 initial groundfish harvest specifications and prohibited species bycatch allowances contained in this action supersede the interim 1995 specifications.

TAC Specifications and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC)

The specified TAC for each species is based on the best available biological and socioeconomic information. The Council, its Advisory Panel (AP), and its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed current biological information about the condition of groundfish stocks in the BSAI at their September and December 1994 meetings. This information was compiled by the Council's BSAI Groundfish Plan Team and is presented in the final 1995 Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report for the BSAI groundfish fisheries, dated November 1994. The Plan Team annually produces such a document as the first step in the process of specifying TACs. The SAFE report contains a review of the latest scientific analyses and estimates of each species' biomass and other biological parameters. From these data and analyses, the Plan Team estimates an acceptable biological catch (ABC) for each species category.

A summary of the preliminary ABCs for each species for 1995 and other biological data from the September 1994 draft SAFE report were provided in the discussion supporting the proposed 1995 specifications. The Plan Team's recommended ABCs were reviewed by the SSC, AP, and Council at their