

the following information: Vessel name and permit number, owner and caller name, DAS confirmation number, phone number, and the hail weight of cod on board and the amount of cod to be offloaded, if any. A vessel that has not exceeded the landing limit and is offloading and ending its trip by calling out of the multispecies DAS program does not have to report under this call-in system.

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(2) *Exemption.* A vessel fishing under a NE multispecies DAS is exempt from the landing limit described in paragraph (b)(1) when fishing south of a line beginning at the Cape Cod, MA coastline at 42°00' N. lat. and running eastward along 42°00' N. lat. until it intersects with 69°30' W. long., then northward along 69°30' W. long. until it intersects with 42°20' N. lat., then eastward along 42°20' N. lat. until it intersects with 67°20' W. long., then northward along 67°20' W. long. until it intersects with the U.S.-Canada maritime boundary, provided that it does not fish north of this exemption area for a minimum of 30 consecutive days (when fishing under the multispecies DAS program), and has on board an authorization letter issued by the Regional Administrator. Vessels exempt from the landing limit requirement may transit the GOM/GB Regulated Mesh Area north of this exemption area, provided that their gear is stowed in accordance with one of the provisions of § 648.81(e).

(3) *Transiting.* A vessel that has exceeded the cod trip limit as specified in paragraph (b)(1) of this section and is, therefore, subject to remain in port for the period of time described in paragraph (b)(1)(ii)(A) of this section, may transit to another port during this time, provided that the vessel operator notifies the Regional Administrator (see Table 1 to § 600.502 for the Regional Administrator's address) either at the time the vessel reports its hailed weight of cod or at a later time prior to transiting, and provides the following information: Vessel name and permit number, destination port, time of departure, and estimated time of arrival. A vessel transiting under this provision must stow its gear in accordance with one of the methods specified in

§ 648.81(e), and may not have any fish on board the vessel.

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[FR Doc. 97-29706 Filed 11-10-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[I.D. 110597A]

RIN: 0648-AH67

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Forage Fish Species Category

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

ACTION: Notice of availability of amendments to fishery management plans; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) has submitted Amendment 36 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area and Amendment 39 to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMPs) for Secretarial review. Amendments 36 and 39 would define a forage fish species category in both FMPs and implement associated management measures. The intended effect of the amendments is to prevent the development of an unrestricted fishery for forage fish, which are a critical food source for many marine mammal, seabird, and fish species.

DATES: Comments on Amendment 36 and 39 must be received by January 12, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Comments on Amendments 36 and 39 should be submitted to the Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668, Attn: Lori Gravel, or delivered to the Federal Building, 709 West 9th Street, Juneau, AK. Copies of the amendments and the Environmental

Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review prepared for the amendments are available from NMFS at the above address, or by calling the Alaska Region, NMFS, at 907-586-7228.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kent Lind, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The intent of the Council is to implement a program that would establish a forage fish species category and would allow for the management of these species in a manner that prevents the development of a commercial directed fishery for forage fish, which are a critical food source for many marine mammal, seabird and fish species. Management measures for this species category will be specified in regulations and may include such measures as prohibitions on directed fishing, limitations on allowable bycatch retention amounts, or limitations on the sale, barter, trade or any other commercial exchange, as well as the processing of forage fish in a commercial processing facility.

A proposed rule to implement Amendments 36 and 39 has been received from the Council. In accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Act, NMFS is evaluating the proposed rule to determine whether it is consistent with the amendments, the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and other applicable law. If that determination is affirmative, NMFS will publish it in the **Federal Register** for public review and comment.

Comments received by January 12, 1998, whether specifically directed to the amendment or the proposed rule, will be considered by NMFS in its decision to approve, disapprove, or partially approve Amendments 36 and 39. Comments received after that date will not be considered by NMFS in this decision. All comments received by NMFS on these amendments or on the proposed rule during their respective comment periods will be addressed in the final rule.

Dated: November 5, 1997.

Gary C. Matlock,

Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 97-29769 Filed 11-10-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F