sole fishery. Whereas the majority of the red king crab historically taken in the rock sole fishery were within the RKCSA, this area has also provided a significant percentage of groundfish catch. The potential impacts of the closure are made more significant because of the recent closure of the Pribilof Islands area to vessels using trawl gear (§ 675.24(h)). The Pribilof Islands area has historically been important to the rock sole fishery

Åppendix 2 to the EA/RIR/IRFA for Amendment 37 (see ADDRESSES) contains an economic comparison of the 1993, 1994, and 1995 rock sole fisheries. This analysis compares the 1993, 1994, and 1995 rock sole fishery using several different scenarios (i.e., with and without the Pribilof Island closure, different price sets, etc.). As an example, the 1994 and 1995 fishery data for the rock sole fishery, accounting for the closure of the Pribilof Island area in 1995, and using inseason 1994 prices, indicate that gross and net product value decreased by 35 percent, bycatch costs decreased by 51 percent, and net

benefit decreased by 30 percent. The factors that would determine the effects of closing the RKCSA in the future will change. In the future, the adjustment to such a closure would tend to be less difficult than in 1995 because the fleet has the experience of having adjusted to the emergency rule closure in 1995.

The Council recommended closure of the RKCSA from January 20 through March 31. The greatest number of female red king crab is most likely to be taken as bycatch during this time. Inseason closures of an area are authorized for a period of 60 days, which would be less than the Council's intended closure period. Regulations at § 675.20(e)(6) authorize closures beyond 60 days if warranted by available data. The available scientific information indicates that the relative distribution and abundance of female red king crab in the closure area is high. Large numbers of red king crab have been taken from this area by trawling operations during the early part of the year when the concentration of female king crab is high. To ensure that bycatch

of female red king crab is minimized in the early season trawl fisheries, NMFS is extending the closure for an additional 11 days beyond the usual 60day effective period, through March 31, 1996. The Regional Director, Alaska Region, has determined that this interim closure is based on the best available scientific information concerning the seasonal distribution and abundance of red king crab and the bycatch rates of red king crab associated with groundfish trawl fisheries.

Classification

This action is taken under § 672.20(e) and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: December 4, 1995.

Richard W. Surdi,

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

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