**Marine Enforcement Highlights January – February 2023**

**January**

District 9 CPOs attended the Wildwood Fishing and Boating Expo for two weekend days in early January. The Conservation Police Officers' table proved to be a popular spot. The officers fielded questions from hundreds of visitors and distributed State and Federal outreach material.

Utilizing the Bureau of Law Enforcement's P/V Integrity, several NJ Fish and Wildlife Marine Unit CPOs participated in a 3-day operation with the National Marine Fisheries Service to detect and deter Federal violations of 50CFR 224.105 - Speed restrictions to protect North Atlantic right whales. The North Atlantic right whale remains one of the most endangered large whales in the world with an estimated population of under 400 individuals at the end of 2018. One of the biggest threats to right whale survival is collisions with vessels. In 2008, the National Marine Fisheries Service implemented a seasonal mandatory (less than 10 knots) speed rule for vessels over 65' in length in certain areas to reduce the risk of vessel collisions with right whales. The goal of the operation was to enforce the speed rule and to educate mariners on its existence. Ships were monitored with a combination of Automatic Identification Systems (AIS), Mini Automatic Radar Piloting Aid (MARPA) and handheld radar technology. Officers identified approximately 30 vessels in excess of 65' transiting the speed restriction zone outside of Delaware Bay but observed no speed rule violations.

**February**

On 2/21/2023 Conservation Police Officers Woerner and Bahrle conducted an inspection of a commercial fishing vessel in Point Pleasant Beach, Ocean County. As the crew began to offload their catch the officers quickly realized that the vessel was going to be over its 100-pound trip limit of weakfish. The vessel was initially found to be in possession of 122 pounds of weakfish, but an additional seven pounds was located as the officers continued their inspection. Summonses were issued to the captain and owner of the vessel for possessing 29 pounds of weakfish more than the daily trip limit. Court is set for the end of March. 

As recreational activity slowed in January, Officers from District 8 focused enforcement efforts on commercial fishing activity. During a commercial inspection of a fish pot vessel, CPO Capri located a small amount of tautog. It was found that the vessel did not possess a commercial non-directed tautog landing permit, and thus could not land any tautog. CPO Capri investigated the vessel’s previous landings and found multiple violations, including additional landings of tautog, directed landings of summer flounder without a landing permit, and several dealer reporting violations. Summonses were issued for the violations.

CPO Meyer and Lt. Harp conducted inspections on two commercial scallop vessels returning to Barnegat Light. The vessels were landing at approximately the same time and the CPOs were able to conduct simultaneous inspections. The officers observed and recorded the weights as the scallops were offloaded. As the offload was coming to completion, it became clear that both of the vessels had exceeded the 600-pound trip limit, one significantly greater than the other. The overage was recorded and documented, and the case is being referred to National Marine Fisheries Service for enforcement action.

On the evening of February 10, 2023, CPO Raker received a complaint of two individuals keeping closed season and undersized striped bass on the Corbin City Impoundment of Tuckahoe WMA. The complainant stated that the men had already left, but provided detailed information about the two individuals, the area they fished, and the vehicle they were driving. The next day CPO Raker passed the suspect vehicle on the impoundment road and watched the driver walk out to the same location that the violation was reported the previous night. CPO Raker set up surveillance and observed the men retain and hide striped bass at different locations along the marsh. A short time later, in coordination with CPO Tomlin, the two officers were able to recover five undersized striped bass measuring between 18 and 22 inches that were hidden in the marsh grass. The two fishermen were charged with taking striped bass out of season, possession of undersized striped bass, and the possession of over the limit striped bass.