**Marine Enforcement Highlights May-June 2023**

In early May, CPO Capri and Lt. Harp conducted an overnight boat patrol and observed a vessel

traveling across Barnegat Bay in the dark without using navigational lights. CPO Capri and Lt. Harp were able to follow the trail of bubbles left by the vessel and establish the general direction of travel. CPO Capri and Lt. Harp began searching the area and found three gillnets, each 300-feet in length, which were set and actively fishing in the bay. Before dawn, the suspect returned to the nets and began hauling them onto his vessel. CPO Capri and Lt. Harp, who had been waiting in the dark for several hours at this point, apprehended the individual. The three nets, containing white perch, striped bass, bluefish, horseshoe crabs, menhaden, gizzard shad, and blue crabs, were seized. The individual responsible is facing multiple counts of unauthorized use of a gillnet, failure to properly mark gillnet, failure to mark nets with identification, failure to mark gillnet stake, taking of striped bass with net, possession of horseshoe crab with gillnet, and failure to utilize navigational lights at night.

On the early evening of May 22nd, CPO Bahrle conducted an inspection of a recreational fishing vessel returning to a local boat ramp. The four fishermen on board the vessel told the CPO that they had kept 30 to 40 black sea bass. CPO Bahrle boarded the vessel and quickly realized the fishermen had over their limit of black sea bass as well as numerous undersized fish. CPO Bahrle counted the fish and found that the vessel had 65 black sea bass which made them 25 black sea bass over the limit. Of the 65 black sea bass 51 were under the legal-size limit of 12.5 inches. One tautog was also located on the vessel which was possessed during the closed season. A total of nine summonses was issued to the fisherman for the possession of undersized and over limit black sea bass and the possession of a closed season tautog.

On June 12th, CPO Bahrle located a group of four clammers off Maclearie Park in Belmar. CPO Bahrle issued summonses to the clammers for not possessing shellfish licenses and educated them with a written warning on the dangers of eating shellfish from the restricted waters of Shark River. After clearing the area CPO Bahrle received a complaint from dispatch that a Belmar police officer located another group of clammers in the same location. CPO Bahrle set up and made observations on the group of clammers to confirm their harvest activities. During his observations, he noticed one of the individuals was a clammer that he just issued a summons to. CPO Bahrle apprehended this group up and issued a summons for not obtaining shellfish licenses and written warnings for harvesting shellfish from the restricted waters of the Shark River. The individual that was caught for the second time, received another summons for not having a shellfish license and a summons for harvesting from the restricted waters of the Shark River which is a petty disorderly persons offense with a maximum fine of $500 fine and up to 30 days in jail.

On June 17th CPO’s Woerner and Bahrle along with Lt. Moscatiello conducted an inspection of a party boat. During the inspection it was determined the vessel was fishing in federal waters. The vessel did not have the required federal permits that would allow them to be compliant in federal waters. It was also determined the vessel was filleting black sea bass at sea and discarding the racks from the filleted fish. Summonses were issued to the vessel’s owner and operator for violating the conditions of the fillet permit. The fishing in federal waters without the required permits was referred to the National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Law Enforcement for enforcement action.

Multiple marine CPO’s participated in conducting fixed gear and fishing inspections on the Bureau’s patrol vessel Integrity. Several recreational and commercial lobster pot violations were found on the Axel Carlson Reef site including several single lobster pots and lobster pot trawls that were found deployed in the closed area. Other gear violations found were failure to properly mark gear with identification and failure to notify the Division prior to the deployment of pots in the ‘all access zone’. During these patrols, one vessel was inspected offshore and found to be fishing for tuna while engaged in a tuna tournament without a valid Federal highly migratory species permit. Appropriate enforcement action was taken for all cases.

On June 4th, CPO Klitz was conducting a patrol in Barnegat Light, monitoring fishing activity on the inlet jetty. CPO Klitz made observations of two individuals leaving the area with heavy re-usable shopping bags and fishing equipment. Upon inspection, the two bags were found to contain 67 tautog for which the season is currently closed. All the tautog were under the 15-inch size limit and ranged from 6 inches to 14 inches. Summonses were issued to the two individuals, and they face penalties in excess of $13,000.00.