**Marine Enforcement Highlights January 2024**

In early January, CPO Bahrle was patrolling the Sandy Hook Bay area when he observed two clammers, which were participating in the hard clam depuration program, harvesting clams from the Atlantic Highlands Municipal Harbor. The harbor is classified as prohibited waters and the harvesting of shellfish from this location is not allowed due to the potential health risk. CPO Bahrle apprehended the clammers as they were returning to the depuration plant to offload their product. All clams aboard the vessels were returned to the waters and summonses were issued to the clammers for harvesting shellfish from prohibited waters and for harvesting clams from an area not specified for the depuration program. The clammers face significant penalties, which includes a suspension of their commercial shellfish license and depuration permit.

CPO Klitz conducted an evening patrol in Barnegat Light where, just prior to dark, he observed a recreational fishing vessel returning to the municipal ramp. Upon inspection, the fishermen claimed they had three legal-sized striped bass located in a rear hatch of the vessel. CPO Klitz noticed the fishermen appeared nervous and eager to end the inspection. CPO Klitz located the three striped bass and began inspecting additional compartments on the vessel. Located in a live-well under the seat were an additional 19 striped bass, filling the live-well to capacity. Summonses were issued for 19 striped bass over the daily limit, seven undersized striped bass, and two oversized striped bass. The defendant plead guilty to possessing 19 striped bass over the daily limit for a total penalty of $1900.00.

Lieutenant Petruccelli charged a North Carolina commercial fishing vessel owner/operator after identifying violations against NJ’s Possession in Excess of Daily Limit Vessel License. NJ’s Possession in Excess of Daily Limit License allows commercial fishing vessels to enter NJ’s ports with summer flounder and black sea bass that will eventually be landed in other states. The vessel must be properly licensed, and the excess fish must be lawfully landed and sold in the intended state. In this situation, the vessel operator landed a trip limit of NJ’s summer flounder in Cape May and declared his intention for the excess summer flounder on board to be landed and sold in Virginia. When the vessel left NJ, however, it immediately transited to Massachusetts where it landed in New Bedford to gear up for scallop fishing. NJ CPOs contacted Massachusetts authorities who conducted an inspection of the vessel and determined the excess summer flounder was unlawfully filleted at sea and concealed in various places on board. The operator admitted to also discarding an additional amount of the excess summer flounder on the way into port. The vessel was also charged in Massachusetts for landing summer flounder without a permit and for filleting them at sea.