**Marine Region Highlights**

**July & August**

**July**

Lieutenant Petruccelli located fish traps deployed on the Ocean City Reef. The Ocean City Reef is one of 13 artificial reef sites federally designated as a special management zone (SMZ) and is off limits to trap gear in an effort reduce user group conflicts and maintain the intended socioeconomic benefit of the sites. Despite these federal measures being in effect for the last six years, the fisherman claimed to not know the rule existed. The case was referred to National Marine Fisheries Service for enforcement action.

During a patrol onboard the Bureau’s patrol vessel Integrity, Conservation Police Officers Tomlin, Szelc, and Lt. Petruccelli found multiple lobster traps unlawfully deployed outside of the designated full-access zones on the Axel Carlson artificial reef site. One commercial and one recreational fisherman were charged with state violations. It will be the second offense for the commercial fisherman charged in this case.

Conservation Police Officers Henderson and Raguz were on boat patrol off Sandy Hook when they

conducted an inspection of a vessel engaged in fishing for tuna. The inspection revealed a bluefin tuna with a curved fork length that measured 90 inches. The season for bluefin tuna that have a curved fork length of 73 inches or greater was closed. The case was referred to National Marine Fisheries Service for enforcement action.

Lieutenant Moscatiello conducted an inspection of a local commercial fishing vessel that was landing in Point Pleasant. The inspection revealed that the vessel failed to call in for a summer flounder offload. Commercial fishing vessels that are participating in the directed summer flounder fishery are required to notify the Department at least two hours prior to offloading their catch. During the investigation it was revealed that the vessel failed to call in on at least three prior summer flounder fishing trips. Lt. Moscatiello issued summonses to the captain and company for the violations. The vessel faces a 60-day suspension of their summer flounder landing permit and up to a $3,000 penalty for each offense.

**August**

CPO Szelc was conducting surveillance of shoreside anglers along the jetties in Atlantic City where he observed two fishermen hiding what appeared to be small tautog in the rocks. One of the anglers retrieved a bucket from the rocks and took it to a vehicle parked nearby. The individual entered the driver’s seat and started the vehicle. Moments later the second individual quickly ran to the waiting vehicle with a much larger, heavy bucket. CPO Szelc apprehended both individuals at the vehicle and found the first bucket only contained a small number of undersized tautog, however, the second bucket was nearly full. In total the two individuals were in possession of 23 undersized tautog, two undersized black seabass, and one undersized summer flounder. A total of eight summonses were issued for the multiple violations.

CPO Szelc responded to a complaint involving a group of individuals keeping undersized summer flounder beneath the Brigantine Bridge. CPO Szelc located the group and observed them utilizing nets to catch baitfish. Upon inspection, CPO Szelc found one undersized summer flounder among the baitfish. Through the course of the inspection, CPO Szelc located a cooler belonging to the group and found nine additional undersized summer flounder and one undersized black sea bass inside. Summons were issued to the responsible individuals.

During a patrol on board the Bureau’s patrol vessel Integrity, CPOs Tomlin, Woerner and Lt. Petruccelli observed four men on a small recreational fishing vessel engaged in shark fishing activity. After only a few minutes, CPOs observed one of the men gaff and boat a sandbar shark, which is a prohibited species. CPOs conducted an at-sea boarding of the vessel and found over 20 undersize and over the limit black sea bass. The individuals were charged Federally for the prohibited species and issued state summonses for the black sea bass violations. These same individuals were charged with multiple marine fishing violations in the past. During the same patrol, CPOs found multiple lobster pot trawls from three separate commercial fisherman inside the area of the Axel Carlson Reef site closed to lobster and fish trap use. The fishermen were issued summonses for state artificial reef site violations.

During a patrol to ensure compliance with safe and sanitary handling practices amongst the shellfish industry, Lt. Petruccelli found oyster aquaculture farmers with violations including failing to meet vibrio control plan time to temperature control requirements for harvesting oysters and failure to adhere to special conditions of the aquaculture permit. The farmers were issued the appropriate summonses.

CPOs Tomlin and Raker conducted night patrols in areas where shoreside shark fishing has gained tremendous popularity. During these patrols, CPOs issued multiple summonses for mishandling state and federally prohibited species of sharks. Dozens of anglers were also educated on identification of prohibited shark species and proper release techniques to ensure their survival.