

## **Marine Enforcement Highlights Oct-Nov-Dec 2020**

CPO Henderson and RCPO Capri observed a vessel returning to a marina in Ocean Township, Ocean County. Upon inspection of the vessel, it was discovered that the group of five fishermen were in possession of eight striped bass. Three of which had bonus tags just slipped through the fish's gills, but not properly secured. Through further investigation, RCPO Capri was able to determine that two of the bonus tags belonged to friends of the captain whom were not even fishing on that trip. The appropriate summonses were issued.

With the Fall striped bass migration in full swing, Marine Region CPOs performed multiple boat patrols off the New Jersey Coast from Cape May north to Sandy Hook. The primary focus of these patrols was to enforce the federal regulations pertaining to the unlawful taking and possession of Atlantic striped bass in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). More than a dozen cases involving anglers taking and possessing Atlantic striped bass in the EEZ were made, and each violation carries a penalty of \$500 per striped bass. The cases were referred to the National Marine Fisheries Service for prosecution.

CPO Moscatiello responded to a complaint at the Manasquan Inlet, Point Pleasant Beach involving a fisherman allegedly catching and keeping undersized and out-of-season summer flounder. The caller was able to give an accurate description of the individual including the license plate of a vehicle the fisherman was placing the fish in. Based on the thorough details provided, CPO Moscatiello was able to quickly locate the suspect vehicle just as the fisherman was packing his gear up and getting ready to leave. As the officer approached the rear of the vehicle, he could see several summer flounder located in an open cooler. Additional summer flounder were still in the fisherman's bucket, and the fisherman admitted to catching and keeping all the fish. In total the fisherman was in possession of 17 summer flounder during the closed season, all of which were less than the legal-size limit of 18 inches. The appropriate summonses were issued.

Although the limit was one fish, the tautog fishing activity in late October/early November continued to be high and CPO's made significant cases by both land and boat. In North Wildwood, CPO's Raker and Tomlin apprehended two individuals with 47 undersized tautog and 5 undersized black seabass. Three days later while conducting inspections of vessels returning to the Spicer's Creek boat ramp, CPOs Tomlin and Raker located 14 tautog in a small inflatable boat; 12 of which were undersized. Shortly after clearing the inspection of the inflatable boat, CPOs Raker and Tomlin inspected a second vessel. The Individuals denied having any fish on board, However, CPO Tomlin located a hidden compartment containing 24 tautog, 15 of which were undersized. The following week CPO's Harp and Sloan conducted an inspection of a small vessel returning to Spicer's Creek boat ramp. the inspection revealed 17 tautog, 10 undersized, which were in multiple compartments and coolers onboard the vessel. All parties apprehended for violations involving tautog face penalties of \$100.00 per fish.

November 1st marked the opening of the 15 fish black sea bass season. During this time anglers may retain 15 black sea bass with a minimum length of 13 inches. Officers in District 8 had received complaints of patrons on a Cape May County party fishing vessel exceeding the daily bag limit and retaining undersized black sea bass. On November 10, CPOs Tomlin, Harp and Lieutenant Petrucci conducted an inspection of the party vessel as it returned to the dock. Nearly all the patrons onboard the vessel were found to be in violation of black sea bass size and bag limits. A total of 289 black seabass were seized and donated to Atlantic City Rescue Mission. A total of 17 summonses were issued for undersized and/or over the limit black sea bass. On November 14, CPO's Raker, Meyer, Sloan and Lt.

Petrucelli conducted an inspection of a different Cape May County party fishing vessel as it returned from a black sea bass trip. Several patrons were found in violation and a total 10 summonses were issued for the 80 undersized/over limit sea bass.

Responding to complaints in the area CPO Klitz and Recruit Szalc conducted a tautog patrol on the "canal" in Point Pleasant Borough, Ocean County. The CPO's quickly located three individuals keeping tautog under the current size limit of 15". The subjects were successfully apprehended with over 20 undersized tautog. The officers seized the fishermen's gear and issued multiple summonses for the violations.

CPO's Klitz and Woerner conducted a night patrol for striped bass violations in Perth Amboy, Middlesex County. Just before 2300 hours the officers conducted a foot patrol and found multiple groups in violation for possessing undersized striped bass as well as over their daily possession limit. A total of 10 undersized striped bass were seized and multiple summonses were issued to the individuals totaling \$1,000 in penalties plus costs.

CPO Henderson and Recruit Capri were conducting a boat patrol in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Seaside Park, Ocean County. They observed a vessel with three fishermen onboard actively trolling for striped bass and in the process of reeling one in. As the CPOs approached the vessel one of the fishermen hastily bent down out of sight at the stern of the vessel. Moments later the fisherman in question stood up and was holding two dead striped bass with one having a bonus tag attached. Once the hooked striped bass was landed, Recruit Capri boarded the vessel and verified there were only three striped bass onboard. After observing the corroded condition of the metal striped bass bonus tag, Recruit Capri suspected foul play was taking place with the bonus tag. After a brief interview, the fisherman admitted the bonus striped bass only had the bonus tag slipped through the gill plate and was not securely fastened prior to the approach of the CPOs. With the intent to circumvent the regulations so additional bonus fish could be taken at another time, the fisherman was issued a summons for failing to properly tag a bonus fish immediately upon retention.

CPO Moscatiello and Recruit Capri were conducting surveillance of the Barnegat Bay at the Barnegat Light Boat Ramp when they observed two fishermen inbound to the High Bar Harbor Marina. CPO Moscatiello and Recruit Capri then relocated to the High Bar Harbor Marina to conduct an inspection of the vessel. Upon inspection the two fishermen were in possession of 3 striped bass. Recruit Capri spoke with the operator of the vessel and which claimed that they had dropped off a third fisherman at Van's Marina because he was not feeling well. The operator provided a detailed description of the third fisherman to Recruit Capri. When the alleged third fisherman arrived on scene, he did not match the description that the operator gave, was unaware of which boat they fished on and couldn't retrace of the events that happened aboard the vessel that day. The operator then admitted that the third fisherman had not been on the vessel at all that day. Recruit Capri issued a summons for possessing one striped bass over the daily limit and an additional summons for interference.

In November, CPO Tomlin and Recruit Szalc began reviewing commercial fishing vessel trip reports for the port of Cape May. The officers discovered a summer flounder landing that exceeded the allowable daily landing limit by 2000 pounds. The discovery prompted further investigation by CPO's Raker, Tomlin, and Recruit Szalc. Through a course of interviews, it was determined there was a miscommunication between the dealer and the vessel which led to the vessel bringing in over the trip

limit. Summonses for landing over the daily trip limit and accepting summer flounder in excess of the trip limit were issued to both the vessel and the dealer.

CPO's in Cape May have been busy with the implementation of the new possession in excess of daily limit vessel license. This license allows vessels to enter port and offload catch while retaining summer flounder and black sea bass onboard that is bound for another state. On December 13th CPO Tomlin and Recruit Szclc conducted an inspection of a commercial fishing vessel in Cape May. The vessel operator claimed to be landing scup and summer flounder under New Jersey daily landing limits and had black sea bass on board bound for Virginia. The vessel, which did not have a New Jersey black sea bass landing permit, had failed to notify the department of any landing. This is an essential requirement in the law which allows enforcement to monitor the excess fish which are being landing in New Jersey. CPO Tomlin and Recruit Szclc issued the appropriate summonses for failing to call in for the possession in excess of a daily limit landing, failing to call in for a directed summer flounder landing, and exceeding the bycatch limit of black sea bass.

District 8 CPO's have been actively inspecting party fishing vessels in Atlantic and Cape May counties stemming from large quantities of undersized/over the limit fish being found in early November. On November 28th, CPO's Tomlin, Meyer, Sloan and Recruit Szclc inspected 2 Cape May party boats returning from black sea bass fishing trips. The officers inspected patrons as they departed the vessels and recovered approximately 75 illegal black sea bass. A total of 11 summonses were issued primarily for possession of over the daily limit of black sea bass. This increased inspection frequency of party fishing vessels in Cape May and Atlantic Counties has had a noticeable impact on the violation rate of patrons as more recent inspections have resulted in minor, if any, violations.