**Marine Enforcement Highlights Jun-July-August 2021**

On June 26th while on a vessel patrol in Barnegat Inlet, CPOs Meyer and Capri inspected vessels returning from offshore fishing. Two vessels were found in possession of undersized yellowfin tuna, which are required to have a minimum length of 27 inches. Additionally, one of the vessels in possession of the undersized yellowfin tuna failed to possess a federal Highly Migratory Species (HMS) permit required to target and possess tuna. These cases were submitted to National Marine Fisheries Service NMFS for enforcement action.

CPO Szelc and Lt. Harp conducted a land-based patrol on Sunday, July 11th. The CPOs located two large groups of individuals actively harvesting clams from the condemned waters of Lakes Bay in Egg Harbor Twp. The inspections resulted in nine summonses issued for harvesting shellfish without a license, and warnings for harvesting shellfish from condemned waters and clamming on Sunday. CPOs Szelc and Lt. Harp continued their patrol and issued an additional eight summonses for various other violations totaling 17 summonses issued throughout coastal Atlantic County that day.

While patrolling Fortescue on a Sunday afternoon, CPO Sloan observed four individuals harvesting shellfish from a rockpile in condemned waters. Upon inspection, they were found to be in possession of several hundred oysters and mussels. None of the individuals had a shellfish license. All the shellfish were seized, and the harvesters were issued the appropriate summonses.

To protect sea turtles, chain mats and turtle deflector dredges are required to be used May 1st through November 30th when commercial fishing for scallops west of 71 degrees longitude. Upon its return from a scallop fishing trip in the mid-Atlantic sea scallop access area, Lieutenant Petruccelli found a commercial scallop vessel based out of Cape May in possession of a scallop dredge without the required turtle chain mat. The vessel operator initially made false statements proclaiming that the turtle chain mat had been ripped off the dredge on bottom structure while fishing. Further interview revealed that the operator did not utilize the chain mats on that trip and several previous trips. The case was referred to National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for enforcement action.

During offshore patrols with the Bureau’s P/V Integrity the last couple of months, CPOs documented numerous Federal and State violations. The violations included several cases of failure to mark / identify trap gear, two cases of failing to possess a highly migratory species (HMS) permit, possession of HMS other than form specified, utilization of an otter trawl in state waters without an otter trawl license, utilization of an otter trawl within two miles of the coastline, unlawful commercial lobster traps inside a special management zone, and three cases of failing to report bluefin tuna within 24 hours of harvest. The Federal cases were referred to National Marine Fisheries Service for enforcement action and the appropriate summonses were issues for the State violations.

On August 6th, 2021, CPO Moscatiello received a complaint through the Operation Game Thief hotline reporting that a fisherman was bragging about targeting and catching sandbar sharks. The complainant provided photos, which clearly showed the fisherman mishandling a sandbar shark. After tracking down the individual in the photos, CPO Moscatiello issued a summons to the shark fisherman who admitted to taking and landing prohibited sharks.

On August 1st, the tautog season opened allowing anglers to retain one tautog with a minimum size of 15 inches. CPO Szelc and Lt. Harp spent the opening day conducting a land-based tautog patrol in Atlantic City. Shortly after beginning the afternoon patrol, the officers made observations of 3 individuals retaining undersize tautog. CPO Szelc conducted an inspection of the individuals as they completed fishing and exited the jetty. A total of 65 undersized tautog were located ranging from 7 to 13 inches. The individuals were issued summonses for the undersized tautog as well as over the daily limit. The current penalty for violations involving tautog is $100.00 per fish.

CPO Tomlin conducted a patrol around Avalon area inspecting vessels returning from offshore fishing. A charter vessel was found in possession of two yellowfin tuna and failed to possess a valid federal Highly Migratory Species (HMS) permit required to target and possess tuna. The case was submitted to National Marine Fisheries Service NMFS for enforcement action.

Lieutenant Petruccelli and CPO Raker conducted late night patrols in areas where shoreside shark fishing has gained tremendous popularity. During these patrols, CPO’s issued multiple summonses and warnings 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 maximize survival.