**Marine Enforcement Highlights Feb-March-April 2021**

On February 25th, CPOs Moscatiello and Henderson conducted an inspection of a commercial fishing vessel in Point Pleasant Beach, Ocean County. Prior to the inspection, the CPOs had confirmed that the vessel had notified the Department with their intent to land 4000 pounds of summer flounder. Upon inspection, the vessel was found to be in possession of nearly 300 pounds over the 4000-pound trip limit. When CPO Moscatiello confronted the operator with his final pack-out weight, the operator then claimed that the extra summer flounder were supposed to have been left on the boat under the vessel’s Possession in Excess of Daily Limit Vessel license which allows vessels to enter port and offload New Jersey’s trip limit while retaining summer flounder and black sea bass onboard that is bound for another state. The vessel had failed to notify the Department of any excess summer flounder landing, which is a requirement in the new law. The vessel and operator were issued summonses for landing summer flounder over the daily trip limit and failing to notify the Department prior to landing summer flounder in excess of the daily trip limit.

On March 12, 2021 officers in district 8 received a complaint from the Marine Mammal Stranding Center regarding a possible Harbor Seal harassment incident that occurred in Atlantic City. According to the complaint, an individual had taken video of himself approaching and petting a Harbor Seal that had hauled out onto one of the jetties in Atlantic City. CPO’s Szelc and Meyer obtained the videos and identification of the suspected individual and conducted an interview the following day. Through the course of the interview, the suspect admitted to creating the video and making contact with the seal. The individual was advised of the of the protections provided to seals under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and that his actions constituted a harassment violation. The case was forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Law Enforcement for further enforcement action.

CPO Meyer conducted inspections of commercial surf clam vessels in Atlantic City last month and encountered multiple Federal violations. The violations included unlawful possession of undocumented Atlantic sea scallops, failure to accurately complete fishing vessel trip reports, and expired Federal operator identification cards. The cases were referred to National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Law Enforcement for further enforcement action.

After receiving numerous striped bass complaints in the Raritan Bay area, Conservation Police Officers focused patrols to deter the illegal take of striped bass. On the evening of April 9th, CPOs Henderson, Klitz, Moscatiello, and Woerner apprehended five individuals with 20 sublegal striped bass which were seized for undersized and overlimit violations. On the following evening of April 10th and into the early morning hours of the 11th, seventeen Conservation Police Officers from across the state participated in an operation focusing on the illegal harvest of striped bass along the Raritan Bayshore in Middlesex and Monmouth counties. Nearly 100 inspections were made resulting in over 30 summonses issued. A week later Conservation Police, again from both marine and inland units, were out in force. More than 140 inspections resulted in an additional 30 summonses.

The land-based tautog fishing started to heat up unusually early this April resulting in CPOs being busy in the Atlantic City area. On April 2, CPOs Meyer and Capri observed an individual retaining multiple tautog on an Atlantic City jetty. The CPOs conducted an inspection of the individual as he was quickly attempting to leave the area. The individual was found to have 5 tautog in a bucket, CPO Meyer and Capri located an additional 10 tautog in a cooler in the vehicle belonging to the fisherman. Of the 15 tautog, 14 were under the minimum size and the individual was 11 over the daily possession limit.