



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

*Working towards healthy, self-sustaining populations of all Atlantic coast fish species, or successful restoration
well in progress by the year 2015*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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PRESS CONTACT: Tina Berger
703.842.0740

ASMFC Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board Initiates Addendum to Address Illegal Striped Bass Harvest

Alexandria, VA – The Commission’s Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board initiated an addendum to address illegal striped bass harvest. The Board’s action is in response to recommendations of the Interstate Watershed Task Force (IWTF). The IWTF conducted a multi-year, multi-jurisdictional investigation on illegal striped bass harvest within Chesapeake Bay which resulted in over \$1.6 million dollars in fines levied against 19 individuals and three corporations for more than one million pounds of illegal striped bass harvested estimated to be worth up to seven million dollars.

The covert investigation determined that some Virginia commercial fishermen were illegally harvesting fish during the Potomac River Fisheries Commission’s closed season, as well as illegally harvesting oversized fish from Virginia waters during the spawning season. Additionally, some Maryland commercial fishermen were taking advantage of loopholes in the state tagging system to falsely report large numbers of smaller, legal-sized fish, allowing them to obtain more tags and exceed quota limits. The investigation also found some wholesale dealers were complicit through false recordkeeping, false check-in, and knowingly buying illegal or untagged fish.

The investigation revealed that the current control measures for regulating striped bass harvest could be improved. The IWTF and the Commission’s Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) recommended increasing penalties for illegally harvested fish and implementing a uniform commercial tagging system among all states with commercial striped bass fisheries.

The IWTF and LEC acknowledge the efforts of Maryland, Virginia and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission in initiating measures to deter the activities detected by the Task Force. Maryland has reformed its commercial fishing management rules, including the suspension or revocation of commercial licenses from violators and increasing the penalty for commercially fishing without a license. The Potomac River Fish Commission has permanently revoked the commercial licenses of the violators identified from the investigation, while Virginia suspended the commercial licenses of identified violators for two years, the maximum amount allowed by Virginia law.

The Board will consider potential management options for inclusion in the Draft Addendum for public comment at the Commission’s Spring Meeting in May. For more information, please contact Kate Taylor, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at ktaylor@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and anadromous species.