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**TWO TIGHLMAN ISLAND FISHERMEN PLEAD GUILTY  
TO ILLEGAL FISH HARVESTING IN THE CHESEPEAKE BAY**

*Ship Captains Poached Hundreds of Thousands of Pounds of Striped Bass*

**Baltimore**, Maryland – Michael D. Hayden, age 41, and William J. Lednum, age 42, both of Tilghman Island, Maryland, pleaded guilty today to conspiring to violate the Lacey Act and to defraud the United States through their illegal harvesting and sale of 185,925 pounds of striped bass.

The plea agreements were announced by United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein; Colonel George F. Johnson IV, Superintendent of the Maryland Natural Resources Police; and Honora Gordon, Regional Special Agent in Charge for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

“These defendants admitted to systematically plundering the Chesapeake Bay of an important and protected natural resource, and at the expense of the many honest fishermen who play by the rules,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department’s Environment and Natural Resources Division. “The Justice Department is committed to enforcing environmental laws that protect our shared natural resources and sustain the vital marine life of the Chesapeake Bay for future generations.”

According to their plea agreements, Hayden and Lednum were “captains” on fishing vessels owned by them, William J. Lednum Fisheries, d/b/a, Michael D. Hayden, Jr., and Michael D. Hayden, Jr., Inc. The defendants also employed numerous “helpers” as part of this scheme, including, co-defendant Kent Sadler.

From at least 2007 to 2011, Hayden and Lednum illegally harvested, possessed, falsely labeled and/or sold at least 185,925 pounds of striped bass. They used illegally weighted and/or anchored gill nets, left the nets in the water overnight, and set the nets during times when the commercial striped bass gill-netting season was closed. The defendants exceeded their maximum daily vessel limit of striped bass and either unloaded the surplus onto an anchored vessel or paid others a fee to check-in fish for them. Hayden and Lednum falsified the permit allocation cards and daily catch records for their striped bass fishing trips to over-report the numbers of striped bass caught and under-report the weights. This allowed them to request additional state tags under false pretenses and therefore harvest additional striped bass illegally.

Hayden and Lednum shipped and sold the striped bass to wholesalers in New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland in the total amount of \$498,293.47. None of the fish was

properly reported at check-in stations or on the permit allocation cards of daily catch records submitted to the State of Maryland. Maryland in turn submits such paperwork to numerous federal and interstate agencies responsible for setting harvest levels all along the eastern seaboard.

The investigation in this case started in February 2011 when the Maryland Department of Natural Resources found tens of thousands of pounds of striped bass snagged in illegal, anchored nets before the season officially reopened. The conspirators were seen on the water in the vicinity of the illegal nets. The subsequent investigation unveiled a wider criminal enterprise to which Hayden and Lednum pled guilty today. Co-defendant Kent Conley Sadler, age 31, also of Tilghman Island, previously pleaded guilty to his participation in the conspiracy and is scheduled to be sentenced on October 21, 2014.

Hayden and Lednum face a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. The defendants have agreed to pay restitution to the State of Maryland of between \$498,293 and \$929,625. The defendants have further agreed to forfeit the monetary equivalent of 80% of the value of the vessel primarily used during the conspiracy. U.S. District Judge Richard D. Bennett scheduled sentencing for Hayden and Lednum on November 4 and 5, 2014, respectively.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein praised the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for their work in the investigation. Mr. Rosenstein thanked Todd W. Gleason and Shennie Patel of the Department of Justice's Environmental Crimes Section, and Assistant U.S. Attorney P. Michael Cunningham, who prosecuted the case.