



Department of Justice

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EIGHT CHARGED WITH ILLEGALLY HARVESTING AND SELLING STRIPED BASS

*Two More Indicted in Largest Ever Investigation into Illegal Commercial Fishing
in the Chesapeake Bay and Potomac River*

WASHINGTON— Five commercial fishermen in St. Mary’s County, Md., a fish wholesaler, its owner and an employee have been charged in Maryland and Washington, D.C., for their role in the illegal harvest, sale, and purchase of hundreds of thousands of pounds of striped bass from the Chesapeake Bay and Potomac River from 2003 through 2007, the Justice Department announced today.

“State and federal authorities are working together to preserve our precious natural resources, including striped bass or rockfish, which was named the official fish of the state of Maryland in 1965” said U.S. Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein. “If commercial fishermen obey the rules, we can all enjoy rockfish forever. If we allow overfishing and fail to enforce those rules, the rockfish population could be wiped out very quickly.”

According to the criminal informations, the individuals and corporation have been charged with violating the Lacey Act, which is a federal law that prohibits individuals or corporations from creating false records for fish or wildlife, and from transporting, selling, or buying fish and wildlife harvested illegally. Specifically, the informations allege that the commercial fishermen transported and sold striped bass, knowing that they had falsely recorded on their permit allocation cards the numbers and weight of the striped bass they caught and failed to accurately record the times when the fish were actually harvested.

Individuals charged include:

- Thomas L. Crowder Jr. of Leonardtown, Md.
- John W. Dean of Scotland, Md.
- Charles Quade of Churchtown, Md.
- Thomas L. Hallock of Catharpin, Va.
- Keith A. Collins of Deale, Md.
- Robert Moore Sr. of Falls Church, Va.
- Robert Moore Jr. of Ashburn, Va.

The company charged is Cannon Seafood Inc., located in Washington, D.C., with Robert Moore Sr., as its owner.

Two additional St. Mary's County commercial fishermen were indicted in October 2008 for similar conduct. Joseph Peter Nelson and Joseph Peter Nelson, Jr., are charged in the District of Maryland in a seven count felony indictment, alleging one count of felony conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act, and six substantive felony Lacey Act counts. The indictment also seeks forfeiture of vessels and vehicles allegedly used by the Nelsons in carrying out the offenses. The indictment alleges that from September 2003 through March 2007 the defendants exceeded their quota of Maryland striped bass by failing to check in all the fish they caught and by falsely inflating the numbers of fish that they allegedly checked-in in order to secure additional Maryland tags. It also alleges that the defendants placed Maryland tags on fish that were not caught in that state's regulated waters, and placed tags on fish that falsely indicated that they were caught by hook and line when they were not. The indictment further alleges that the Nelsons engaged in a series of sales of unlawfully caught fish to undercover agents who were posing as out of state fish wholesalers.

In early spring each year, wild coastal striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*), known regionally as rockfish, enter the estuary or river where they were born to spawn, and then return to ocean waters to live, migrating along the coastline. Fish spawned from the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem contribute the greatest number of striped bass to the Atlantic coastal fishery, and the commercial fishery for Atlantic coastal striped bass is based primarily on migrations of fish born in the Chesapeake Bay area. Striped bass do not die after spawning. They may live up to 30 years and reach 50 pounds or more. The population of coastal Atlantic striped bass depends heavily upon the capability of older, larger, female striped bass to successfully reproduce.

Maryland regulates the commercial catch of striped bass from its waters and enforces the regulations of the Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC), which regulates the commercial catch of striped bass from Maryland waters located in the main stem of the Potomac River. The striped bass management and protection measures, including tagging requirements, closed seasons, size limits, and quota amounts, are focused on maintaining a target spawning stock to protect the fishery from over-fishing. Maryland also requires that all fish caught by a commercial fisherman be weighed and counted at a designated state check-in station, with the total number and total weight of the fish caught recorded on the commercial fisherman's permit allocation card and transmitted to the state of Maryland on a check station daily catch reporting sheet.

A criminal information and indictment are not a finding of guilt. An individual charged by criminal information or indictment is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.

The Lacey Act carries a maximum penalty of 5 years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000, plus the potential forfeiture of the vessels and vehicles used in committing the offense.

The charges are a result of the investigation by an interstate task force formed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Maryland Natural Resources Police and the Virginia Marine Police, Special Investigative Unit in 2003. The task force conducted undercover purchases and sales of striped bass in 2003, engaged in covert observation of commercial fishing operations in the Chesapeake Bay and Potomac River area, and conducted detailed analysis of area striped bass catch reporting and commercial business sales records from 2003 through 2007. The investigation is continuing, and charges against others are possible.

These cases are being prosecuted by Senior Trial Attorney Wayne Hettenbach of the Justice Department's Environmental Crimes Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Stacy Dawson Belf of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Maryland, with assistance from the U.S. Attorney's office for the District of Columbia.

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