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Falmouth Assistant DNR Director Charles Martinsen (second from right) and federal agent Troy Audiatis hoist a crate of illegally caught striped bass onto a truck Wednesday afternoon at Falmouth Inner Harbor.

Officials Seize 1,100 Lbs. Of Fish Caught Illegally

By MARK A. BROWN

Hundreds of pounds of illegally caught striped bass were unloaded at Falmouth Inner Harbor Wednesday afternoon, after the boarding of five fishing boats in federal waters off Chatham.

The bust netted about 1,100 pounds of fish, most of which was brought to Falmouth by federal officers and agents returning in their vessels.

At about 4 PM, the men turned about 800 pounds of the catch over to R. Charles Martinsen III, assistant director of the Falmouth Department of Natural Resources. Assisted by DNR Officer Sarah M. Brooks, Officer Martinsen loaded the fish into a pickup truck and donated it to the nonprofit Falmouth Rod & Gun Club.

"It's what we usually do with illegal catches," said Massachusetts Environmental Police Officer Matthew Bass. "We try to find a charity that can use them so they don't go to waste."

The remaining 300 pounds of fish were taken by other officers to Nantucket to give to a charity, Mr. Bass said.

Officer Martinsen said Rod & Gun Club members filleted the fish and froze it. The fish will be served at a future Game Feed Dinner fundraiser, he said.

With the state's commercial fishing season for striped bass drawing to a close yesterday, Officer Bass, along with a counterpart from Nantucket and federal officers and agents from the US Coast Guard and the US Department of Commerce National Division of Marine Fisheries, patrolled the waters off Nantucket and Chatham Wednesday looking for poachers.

Officer Bass said some fishermen decide to take their chances in federal waters, outside the three-mile limit from Massachusetts' shorelines. The taking of striped bass in federal waters is prohibited, he said, but the market provides an incentive for illegal fishing.

"They can get \$3 to \$3.50 a pound for it, which can add up to several thousand dollars a day," he said.

The officers and agents stopped four boats in federal waters and seized all the fish on board, Officer Bass said. One of the boats, he said, had 30 stripers, which is the state's daily limit. "They claimed they'd caught the fish within state waters and were on their way back to Chatham, but they were four to five miles out of their way," Officer Bass said.

A fifth boat fled from the enforcement vessels as crew members frantically threw their catch of striped bass overboard, he said. The men aboard that vessel later admitted to taking the fish illegally, he said.

The captains and some crew members from the five fishing vessels will face federal charges, Mr. Bass said. The case is being investigated by Special Agents Todd Nickerson and Louis Jachimczyk of the Department of Commerce in New Bedford, who both participated in Wednesday's patrols.