



5800

Dear Permit Holder:

It has come to our attention that there is an increase in conflicts involving fixed fishing gear within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the United States, specifically around the Mud Hole fishing area off the coast of New Jersey. Some of these conflicts have resulted in the destruction of fixed fishing gear and in violence both at sea and on shore.

We are sending this letter to the owners of fishing vessels that may fish in the Mud Hole area to warn you of the increase in fishing gear conflicts and to request your assistance in reporting any incidents. The Coast Guard and NOAA Fisheries take this issue seriously because of the significant safety concerns and economic impacts, which this issue raises. By reporting fishing gear conflicts, you will assist in our investigation, help reduce the number of conflicts that occur in the EEZ, and increase safety.

Gear conflict violations, failure to report, or false reporting of Fishing gear conflict are violations prohibited by the Magnuson-Stevens Act and may result in a fines up to \$120,000.00, criminal penalties and civil forfeiture of any vessel used in the violation. If you become aware of any fishing gear violations, please report the incident immediately to: Coast Guard Group Atlantic City Command Center at (609) 677-2222 or NOAA Fisheries Wall Field Office at (732) 280-6490.

Further, fishing gear conflicts that result in the use of physical violence may be referred to the U.S. Attorney's Office for prosecution. If either party involved in the conflict engages in the use of a firearm, the penalties may be significantly increased.

Finally, if gear conflicts continue, it may be necessary to discuss regulatory changes, such as the creation of seasons, with the Regional Fishery Management Councils and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

Thank you for your assistance in preventing gear conflicts. If you would like further information, please contact the NOAA Fisheries Wall Field Office at (732) 280-6490.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Cohen".

Mr. Andrew Cohen
Special Agent in Charge
NOAA Fisheries
Office for Law Enforcement
Northeast Region

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dale M. Jones".

Commander Dale M. Jones
Chief of Law Enforcement
Fifth Coast Guard District