



U. S. Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SEAFOOD DEALERS AND FISHERMEN PLEAD GUILTY

Michael J. Moore, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Georgia, announces that felony guilty pleas have been entered by the following defendants in a federal environmental crimes prosecution: Junior Wayne Harper, age 59, of Thomasville, GA, Byron James Puckett, age 42, of Cairo, GA, Charles Stacy Logue, age 40, of East Point, FL, and Ronald Irvin Burdette, age 47, of Moultrie, GA.

On December 20, 2011, Harper, the owner and Chief Executive Officer of Harper's Seafood, Inc., a wholesale seafood business located in Thomasville, GA, and Puckett, the company's Vice President, pled guilty before the Honorable Hugh Lawson, District Judge for the Middle District of Georgia, to conspiracy to purchase in interstate commerce fish which they knew had been taken and sold in violation of Florida laws and regulations, in violation of Title 16, United States Code, Sections 3372(a)(2)(A) and 3373(d)(1)(B) (the Lacey Act). Harper and Puckett also pled guilty to making and submitting to the State of Florida a false Florida Marine Fisheries Trip Ticket by identifying an illegally purchased species of fish as a different species, also a felony violation of the Lacey Act. In addition, Harper, Logue and Burdette pled guilty to one felony count of selling and purchasing in interstate commerce fish which they knew had been taken and sold in violation of Florida laws and regulations.

Plea agreements entered in the cases establish that during the timeframe of the conspiracy, Harper's Seafood illegally purchased approximately \$100,000 of fish from 48 fishermen who did not have commercial licenses as required by Florida law, including Logue and Burdette. After it became known in the fishing industry that another seafood dealer was under investigation for similar violations, Harper purchased approximately \$40,000 more fish from the unlicensed fishermen through his personal account. The company's business records also revealed other transactions in which Harper's Seafood purchased fish illegally, with the primary violation being that the fish were sold during a closed season.

Each felony count to which the defendants pled guilty carries a maximum possible sentence of five years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both, a period of supervised release of up to three years, and a \$100 mandatory assessment. The defendants will be sentenced at a later date.

The case was investigated by agents with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC), and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney K. Alan Dasher. Inquiries regarding the case should be directed to Ms. Sue McKinney, Public Affairs Specialist, United States Attorney's Office at (478) 621-2602.

APPROVED FOR RELEASE

Michael J. Moore by [signature]

MICHAEL J. MOORE
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