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### **NOAA Charges Florida Dive Charter Businesses for Fishing Without Federal Permits**

NOAA has charged two dive business owners in Pensacola, Fla., with illegally operating spearfishing charters without the appropriate permits in federal waters off the Florida panhandle.

NOAA and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission launched an investigation in summer 2007 after NOAA special agents in Niceville, Fla., received several complaints about illegal spearfishing charters running out to the USS Oriskany artificial reef and other popular dive spots off Florida's northern Gulf coast.

Undercover officers chartered trips on the vessel *Daisy D.*, owned and operated by Jeffery Michael Folds of Southern Offshore Adventures, and the *Y-Knot*, owned and operated by David John Mucci of Blue Water Adventures. Folds was charged with three counts – operating without a federal charter permit, prohibited use of a powerhead (a device with an explosive charge) to take reef fish, and making a false statement to law enforcement officials. The proposed fine against Folds is \$19,000. Mucci was charged with one count of operating without a federal charter permit and the proposed fine against him is \$12,500.

Both men have 30 days from the date they received their notices of violations to request a hearing before an administrative law judge. Mucci received his notice on Nov. 7 and Folds on Nov. 19.

"It is important that spearfishing charter operators understand they need the same permits as any other fishing charter operating in federal waters," said Allan Coker, NOAA special agent in Niceville.

Anyone with information involving illegal spearfishing charters should contact NOAA's Fisheries Service Office of Law Enforcement national hotline at 1-800-853-1964.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.