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# Lobsterman tagged for fishing untagged traps

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**LA MOINE** — The Marine Patrol has charged a Hancock County lobsterman, William Haas, 55, of Lamoine, with fishing more lobster traps than authorized, fishing untagged gear and fishing more traps on a trawl than allowed.

Under legislation adopted earlier this year, Haas faces a suspension of his license of three to 10 years for fishing 44 more traps than the 800 allowed by law. The new law, LD 575, changed the penalty for fishing over the trap limit from a possible one-year suspension to a mandatory minimum three-year suspension with the possibility of a 10-year suspension.

“The law change this past legislative session puts teeth in the penalties,” Department of Marine Resource Commissioner Patrick Keliher said in a statement announcing the charges against Haas last week.

The recent legislation also stiffened penalties for trap molesting, fishing sunken trawls (unmarked by a buoy), scrubbing eggs and destroying another lobsterman’s vessel by arson or other means.

“These changes were initiated and supported by the lobster industry,” Keliher said. “Industry members made it clear that the few cheaters who fish more than they are allowed by law must be penalized in a way that creates a significant deterrent for others. I strongly believe that these new penalties will discourage these behaviors.”

In June, DMR issued a notice to all industry members outlining the details of the law changes.

“I wanted to make sure that industry members had a clear understanding of these law changes and, so far, the feedback I have received from industry has been extremely positive,” Keliher said.

“Fishermen should take note that Marine Patrol is going to focus significant effort on enforcing lobster trap limits and that the penalties are severe,” said Lt. Jay Carroll, head of the of the Marine Patrol Division II headquartered at Lamoine State Park.

The investigation that led to the charges stemmed from a routine patrol earlier this month on which Marine Patrol personnel hauled and checked a sample of Haas’s gear. Haas fishes in Maine Lobster Zone B, which stretches between Schoodic Point and Newbury Neck.

The gear check revealed that Haas was fishing traps that were not marked with required tags that identify the harvester.

Based on those findings, the Marine Patrol conducted a targeted investigation on the evening of Sept. 11 involving three Marine Patrol vessels and more than 10 officers.

Fishing more than 25 untagged traps is, under the new law, a Class D criminal violation which, in addition to the mandatory license suspension, carries the possible penalties of one year in jail and a \$2,000 fine.

Haas was also charged with violating a regulation that restricts the number of traps on a trawl to three. The penalty for violating this regulation is \$100 per violation.

Keliher is also authorized under the new law to require that Haas to use an electronic Vessel Monitoring System device for a length of time equal to his license suspension after he re-enters the fishery. The system will allow the Marine Patrol to monitor Haas’s geographic location while fishing.

The law also allows the commissioner to limit Haas to using only 300 traps when he re-enters the fishery, and afterward permits him to add 100 traps per year until he reaches his zone limit of 800 traps.

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