

Bahamian jailed in Florida for role in seafood smuggling

By STAFF WRITER ~ Guardian News Desk:

A Bahamian man will have to spend at least one year in a Florida prison for his role in an illegal seafood smuggling operation, according to a press release from the U.S. Attorney's office, which said the sentence was handed down on May 6.

Robbie Franklyn Smith, a 45-year-old Bimini man, was sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge William J. Zloch to serve one year and one day in prison for illegally importing queen conch and spiny lobster into the U.S.

According to the indictment, court records, and statements in court, in December 2005 a vessel operated by a Miami-based seafood dealer, James Hanson, Jr., was intercepted by a U.S. Coast Guard patrol vessel.

"During a boarding and inspection, officers found more than 1,000 pounds of undeclared spiny lobster and approximately 340 pounds of queen conch, which had been supplied to Hanson in The Bahamas by Smith," the release said.

"Hanson intended to land the seafood in the United States and market it through Hansen Seafood, Inc., a company which he owned. According to records in the related cases, between June and December 2005, on approximately a dozen occasions, Hanson purchased spiny lobster and conch harvested in Bahamian waters from Smith, and imported it illegally into the United States using boats owned through Hanson's companies, and employees of his companies. According to court documents, the total fair market value of the trips exceeded \$87,000."

Smith will also have to be supervised for three years after his release.

"No fine was imposed, as the court determined Smith lacked assets to satisfy a criminal fine," the release said.

"Smith's associate, Hanson, was previously convicted and sentenced to pay a criminal fine of \$75,000, perform 300 hours of community service, and to serve a period of three years' probation. Hanson was also ordered to relinquish the proceeds of the seized product, which was valued at \$13,930

and to forfeit the vessel intercepted by the Coast Guard which was used in the commission of the offense, a (38-foot) fiberglass hulled sport fishing vessel."

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