

# ★ Agents raid boats, homes of fishermen

BY MARK HARRINGTON

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State and federal fisheries enforcement agents raided the homes and boats of at least two Long Island commercial fishermen yesterday, confiscating documents and computer files as part of an ongoing probe, officials and the fishermen said.

Anthony Joseph, a fisherman who operates the Stir One from Point Lookout, said law enforcement agents raided his Levittown home at 8:30 a.m., brandishing separate search warrants for his home and boat. They spent hours sifting through documents and computer files but declined to say why they were there, he said.

Joseph, who has fished com-

mercially for 21 years, said agents identified themselves from the National Marine Fisheries Service and the New York Department of Environmental Conservation.

"They went through my kid's bedroom and my shed — every inch of the house," said Joseph, who last week led a contingent of fishermen from Point Lookout to a fishermen's rally in Washington, D.C. "They won't give me a clue what it's about."

A separate crew of agents conducted a raid of his boat, he said.

Agents also raided the Freeport home of another long-time commercial fisherman as he was leaving home for chemotherapy treatments yesterday morning, according to the fisherman, who asked that his name not be used. He said

agents scoured his home, including his attic where he kept 20 boxes of his deceased wife's antiques in crates marked "fish."

They videotaped his entire house, he said, and looked everywhere, including a spice cabinet, for documents.

"I was sitting on the couch and they made me get up and they looked under the couch," said the fisherman, 72, in treatment for pancreatic cancer.

Wyn Hornbuckle, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Justice, declined to comment on the nature of the raids.

"It's an ongoing investigation. We don't comment on ongoing matters," he said.

The DEC declined to comment.

Neither fisherman has been charged with any wrongdoing.



Anthony Joseph said he got no explanation for the searches.

One said he was told by an agent the raid was related to the federal research set-aside program, in which fishermen can buy the right to catch regulated fish beyond their local quotas.

The raids follow a year in which federal investigators found fisheries agents used heavy-handed tactics in policing offshore fisheries and dealers, and misappropriated a for-

feiture fund to buy excess cars, luxury boats and world travel. After the probe, some New York fishermen and wholesalers received reduced fines and settlements from the government.

A spokeswoman for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration declined to comment on yesterday's raids, referring questions to Hornbuckle.

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