

Bristol County Sheriff's Deputy Sentenced for Scheme to Smuggle Illegal Fishing Profits Abroad

A Bristol County Sheriff's Deputy was sentenced today in federal court in Boston for smuggling the profits of an over-fishing scheme to Portugal.

Antonio Freitas, 47, of Taunton, a Sheriff's Deputy with the Bristol County Sheriff's Office and a long-time Task Force Officer with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, was sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge William G. Young to one year and one day in prison and three years of supervised release. In July 2017, Freitas was convicted by a federal jury of one count of bulk cash smuggling and one count of structuring the export of U.S. currency.

On Feb. 5, 2016, Freitas smuggled \$17,500 through airport security and later deposited the money in a Portuguese bank account belonging to Carlos Rafael, the owner of Carlos Seafood Inc. Rafael owned 32 fishing vessels and 44 permits, which amounted to one of the largest commercial fishing businesses in the United States. From 2012 to January 2016, Rafael routinely lied to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration about the quantity and species of fish his boats caught in order to evade federal quotas designed to guarantee the sustainability of certain fish species. He also submitted false records to federal regulators, and sold most of the fish his vessels caught to a wholesale business in New York City in exchange for bags of cash. During meetings with the undercover agents, Rafael said that in dealings with the New York buyer he received \$668,000 in cash, and that he then had the cash smuggled to Portugal to avoid U.S. taxation.

In September 2017, Rafael was sentenced to 46 months in prison and three years of supervised release, during which time he is banned from working in the fishing industry. The Court also ordered Rafael to pay a fine of \$200,000, restitution of \$108,929, and to forfeit four fishing vessels and associated permits.