

ENFORCEMENT AND THE VIRGINIA MARINE POLICE



he Virginia Marine Police (VMP), a division of the Marine Resources Commission, is charged with enforcing saltwater fishing regulations in Virginia waters. The VMP is the largest branch of the state agency.

An operations center maintains continuous radio dispatch with officers stationed throughout the tidal areas of Virginia. Officers work on rotating shifts, providing enforcement and emergency response coverage 24 hours a day.

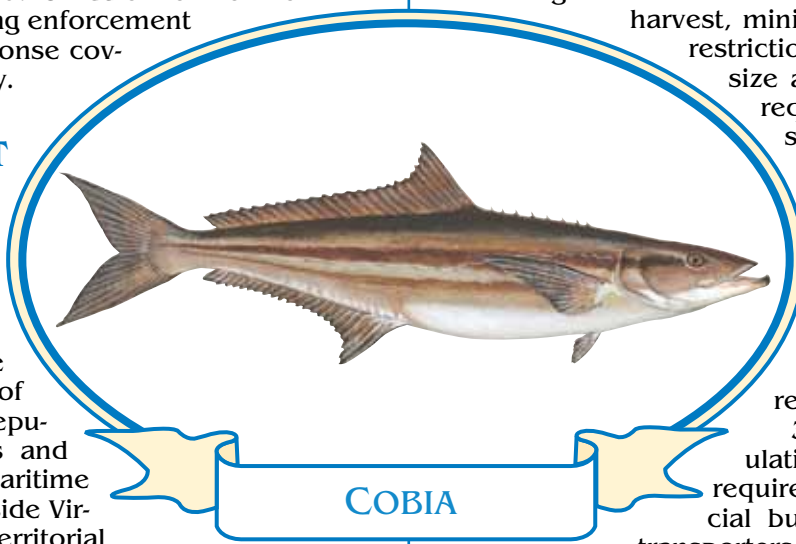
ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES

Marine police officers have full police powers to enforce all of the criminal laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Many are deputized federal agents and enforce federal maritime and fishery laws outside Virginia's three-mile territorial boundary.

While officers are empowered to enforce all state and federal maritime laws, their mission targets enforcement of fishing and boating regulations.

Officers routinely conduct more than 20,000 boating, safety and regulation compliance inspections each year.

Typically, boat operators are checked for the proper safety equipment – such as personal flotation devices, lights, and signaling equipment – and for any violation of fishing size, season or catch limits. Inspections also are made to determine if a vessel operator is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.



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The Virginia Marine Police are busier than ever these days, in part because of post-911 homeland security directives and the increasing complexity of fishery management plans aimed at halting population declines in some species of finfish and shellfish.

Fisheries enforcement activities generally fall into one of four distinct categories:

1. Conservation laws and regulations that apply to commercial and recreational fishermen. These regulations include commercial quotas on harvest, minimum size limits, gear restrictions (such as net mesh size and crab pot cull ring requirements), closed seasons and areas, recreational possession limits, and any other regulations designed to protect living marine resources.
2. Licensing of commercial and recreational fishermen.
3. Conservation regulations and licensing requirements for commercial buyers, processors and transporters of marine finfish and shellfish.
4. State health regulations and the National Shellfish Sanitation Program regulations relating to taking and transporting clams and oysters from polluted areas to clean waters so they can purge themselves of contaminants prior to market sale.

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

When lives and property are in jeopardy on Virginia's tidal waters, the Virginia Marine Police is one of the first to respond.

Search and rescue activities are a major re-



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sponsibility of marine police officers. Fortunately, most of the calls for assistance involve common mishaps, such as engine failure. But each year the VMP handles serious problems, including medical emergencies, boating accidents and drowning fatalities.

Two service activities have a direct relationship to the effectiveness of the enforcement activities of the VMP. First is the time marine police officers must spend in court testifying and prosecuting cases resulting from the summonses written. Efficient and successful prosecution of violations is the only way to ensure good compliance with fishery management regulations.

Second is the time marine police officers spend in public education, such as appearing at boating and fishing shows and manning a display at the Virginia State Fair. These activities often produce significant rewards in garnering compliance with regulations, understanding of the mission and activities of the VMP, and gaining citizen assistance in reporting fishery violations or suspicious activity.

The need for assistance from anglers, boaters, commercial watermen, and other citizens in reporting fishery regulation violations is essential for the protection of Virginia's marine resources.

The VMP covers 120 miles of ocean coastline, more than 1,300 miles of shoreline on the salt-water reaches of tidal rivers, and countless more miles of shoreline on the Eastern Shore seaside and along tidal creeks of the Eastern Shore bay-side and the western shore tributary rivers.

Estimates of the number of marine recreational fishermen range from 350,000 to over 1 million, and approximately 3,000 commercial fishermen operate in Virginia waters. Maintaining 24-hour-per-day coverage requires each marine police officer to cover a large area of water and to monitor an enormous number of fishermen and boaters.

COOPERATIVE ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

Fish are not constrained by the arbitrary political and jurisdictional boundaries which restrict the activities of law enforcement agencies. Some species move up and down the coast and from inshore waters to offshore waters, often passing through the waters of several different political jurisdictions.

The VMP has a good working relationship with many law enforcement agencies, including those listed below:

The Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries, which has primary jurisdiction over freshwater fishing activities. Many species of marine fish periodically migrate across the arbi-



trary boundaries between the tributary rivers and the Chesapeake Bay, entering "freshwater", and cooperative enforcement efforts are necessary.

The U. S. Coast Guard, which enforces fisheries regulations in federal waters. Many fish species migrate inshore and offshore seasonally, which makes joint enforcement efforts extremely productive.

The National Marine Fisheries Service, which also has enforcement agents for federal waters.

The U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which has enforcement agents working with anadromous fish (e.g. striped bass) and Lacey Act violations (transportation of protected wildlife across state lines).

Local Enforcement Agencies, such as local police and sheriff departments in localities near marine waters. They patrol marine waters within their jurisdiction and can provide considerable help to the VMP.

Cooperative enforcement efforts bolster the capabilities of all law enforcement agencies involved and provide much broader enforcement coverage for marine fisheries laws and regulations.



VIRGINIA MARINE POLICE

DIRECTORY OF MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION OFFICES

Main Office:

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Law Enforcement Operations Center:

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
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Virginia Marine Resource Commission
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Belle Haven, VA 23306
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Middle Area Law Enforcement Office:

Virginia Marine Resources
Commission
6097 George Washington Hwy.
Towne and Country Shopping Center
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(804) 695-1936

Northern Area Law Enforcement Office:

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Heathsville Law Enforcement Office
P.O. Box 117
Heathsville, VA 22473
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Southern Area Law Enforcement Office:

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
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30 Jefferson Avenue
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VIOLATIONS "HOTLINE"

The Virginia Marine Police maintain a 24 hour toll-free hotline number for reporting violations of fisheries regulations:
1-800-541-4646.

