

## Summary of Mandatory Recreational Reporting in Virginia, with a Focus on Cobia

The VMRC has instituted mandatory recreational reporting for three different fisheries: cobia, spring trophy striped bass, and the tilefish-grouper complex. Given the vast amount of regulatory attention given to cobia, it has become the centerpiece of this reporting program. These reporting requirements are paired with a mandatory permit to track the number of participants and enforce eligibility. The system is set up such that a permit is needed to fish for cobia, and reporting under that permit is required to remain eligible for a cobia permit in the following year. In the case of private/rental boat fishing or for-hire fishing, only the captain has to get the permit, and he or she reports for everyone on board. For shore/pier fishing, each angler must be permitted. Permittees must report trips individually, and do so within seven days of the trip occurring if they catch any cobia—whether kept or released. Any trip where they do not catch any cobia must be reported by fifteen days after the season’s close. The same deadline applies for reporting “no activity” if the permittee did not take any trips for cobia or catch any as bycatch.

Reports can be filed online or using paper forms; additionally, “no activity” reports may be taken over the phone by VMRC staff. Both the online and paper forms have a section for mandatory data and a section for optional data. Under the cobia regulation, permittees are required to report their VMRC ID number, the date of the trip, the number of anglers on board (if applicable), the mode of fishing, the number of cobia kept, and the number of cobia released. Since amending the regulation, staff has also added a field to the online form asking whether any cobia were caught as the target species or as bycatch. Various optional data streams are included on the online and paper forms. Using the online platform, anglers can submit individual fish reports indicating the species, whether it was kept or released, the length in inches, the weight in pounds, the fishing method (e.g., siph casting, live bait, etc.), the type of bait, the tide, and the spatial location (list of areas, not GPS). Using paper forms, anglers can submit both trip-level data and individual fish information. Among the trip-level information is the targeted species, the county of landing and the hours fished. Among the individual fish information is the species, whether it was kept or released, the length in inches, and the weight in pounds.

Below is a table summarizing the usage of the VMRC mandatory reporting program, with data updated through June 12, 2017.

Number of...	Private/Rental Fleet	For-hire Fleet
Permittees	4,176	189
Permittees with reports	368	13
Trips reported	669	38
Cobia kept	311	34
Cobia released	922	76
No-catch trips	199	1