

Happy New Year from VSSA. If you are receiving this email you are either a current or past member of VSSA or expressed an interest in our activities. **It is time to renew your membership for 2020. For just \$25 you can renew your membership for another year.** If you are still on the fence on whether to join VSSA, please read through this email before deciding. You can renew or join VSSA by clicking below. Note if you are a lifetime member or came to us from the Virginia Charter Boat Association please disregard do not renew your membership, you are good to go.

<http://joinvssa.org/join/>

### **2019 Year in Review**

**Menhaden.** Menhaden (bunker) has been VSSA's number 1 priority. Most of you know the situation and have been reading the news about Wilbur Ross, Secretary of Commerce, finding Virginia out of compliance and a possible moratorium to be in place by July 2020. While VSSA is not taking full credit for this result, we have been at the center of it during this entire year. It took pressure from everyone, from many individuals, many groups, the press, our government, everyone. VSSA continues to lead the [Virginia Menhaden Alliance](#), has supported a town hall meeting with delegates, and has established a new task force of volunteers to work on the issue. Omega made a huge miscalculation by overfishing in the bay and has pretty much lost all their support and friends. Every commercial waterman and charter captain who makes a living off the water obeys laws and regulations when limits are reached and stops fishing. But Omega felt justified to continue fishing after reaching their limit which is contrary to the way every other waterman operates in Virginia or anywhere in the U.S. Please stay tuned with VSSA updates as our General Assembly meets in January and February to consider bills to transfer management from the General Assembly to the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC). We need to keep full pressure on Omega to get a positive result. We will need your support for these bills if they are to pass. If you want to be notified by email when these bill are to be heard in the General Assembly please go here. <http://joinvssa.org/contact/>. For additional information on what we have been up for menhaden please visit: <http://joinvssa.org/action-plan/menhaden/>.

**Striped Bass.** Striped Bass were declared overfished in 2019 and ASMFC responded by calling for each state to reduce catches by 18% for both recreational commercial fishing for 2020. VMRC responded with an Emergency Rule for both the Spring and Fall Seasons in 2019 which prohibited the taking of trophy striped bass for recreational anglers without the mandated balanced cuts called for by

ASMFC. The majority of anglers support doing their share to bring back the stocks and VSSA remains concerned that Virginia recreational anglers alone cannot fix the problem. The Emergency Rule had a devastating impact on charters, tackle shops, hotels, restaurants, particularly hard hit was the Eastern Shore and Cape Charles. VSSA will continue to work to find a solution that will balance conservation and continued sportfishing. And it is not lost that the lack of menhaden has also had a huge impact on the fishery. For more information see: <http://joinvssa.org/action-plan/rockfish/>

**Cobia.** During the summer months, cobia continues to be an outstanding fishery. We believe that putting boat limits on cobia is working to create a healthy, sustainable fishery. Our main issue continues to be that the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) estimates remain on the high side; which only serves to convince fishery managers we are taking more fish than we actually are. Cobia data gathering intercepts/information gathering incidents are low and when they are intercepted those few fish are extrapolated out to huge numbers that are grossly inaccurate. VSSA supports mandatory reporting to VMRC as this has become our only tool to argue the MRIP estimates are high. This means that every year there is a tug-of-war between fishery managers who want to make more cuts and anglers who are seeing good numbers on the water. The overfishing of menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay and Omega's by-catch of cobia is a huge concern too. For more information on cobia visit: <http://joinvssa.org/action-plan/cobia/>

**Reef Program.** VSSA started a new program to support the reefs in Virginia. Virginia has an Artificial Reef Program but has been neglected due to no or low funding by the state. Many of our reefs are sinking into the seafloor bottom and need periodic maintenance with new material in order to keep and attract fish. VSSA is embarking on a program to raise funds with the specific intent to keep the program going by adding new material over time in order to maintain an adequate habitat for our fishery. So far we have raised over \$5000 through donations, sales of reef booklets and products. Anglers on the Eastern Shore have made the most progress and we are hoping to add new reef material shortly. Visit [shorereefs.org](http://shorereefs.org). Please consider volunteering to help our program or donate. For more information. <http://joinvssa.org/reef-program/>

And more. Our unpaid volunteers are working hard to represent your interests to keep recreational fishing strong in Virginia. We attend numerous meetings, make hundreds of phone calls, conduct monthly board meetings, write many letters, emails, petitions, whatever it takes to get the attention of those making decisions. We may not always get the results we want but we make sure they hear from us.

Please go through our website and Facebook pages to get a full appreciation of what we have been up to. Please help us by paying your membership dues today.  
<http://joinvssa.org/join/>.

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