



◊ North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission ◊

Cameron Ingram, Executive Director

September 8, 2023

Kathy B. Rawls
Director, NC Division of Marine Fisheries
P.O. Box 769
3441 Arendell Street
Morehead City, NC 28557

Sent by email only to: kathy.rawls@deq.nc.gov

Director Rawls,

I am writing to express my grave concern that an order you recently gave to your law enforcement officers is unfair to the public and detrimental to our law enforcement officers.

As you are aware, I am a 26-year NC Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) Law Enforcement Officer, that has worked most of my career in the field relying on partnerships with local, state, and federal officers. My experiences with other agencies have varied from routine low-key conversations to deadly force encounters with members of the public. The bond between law enforcement officers is strong and transcends the different agencies for which the law enforcement officers work. In the field, law enforcement officers stick together for their safety and the safety of the regulated public. No one can understand the true bond of law enforcement officers until they are put in a life-threatening situation and see the swarm of blue lights and sirens rushing to save your life. It is something that I am incredibly proud to be a part of and do not take for granted when I make leadership decisions.

As the Director of N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, I acknowledge the challenges and differences that have occurred historically and currently between our agencies. We have worked together, and we have worked separately to do what we believe is required of our organizations, the resources, and the public. We are in challenging times, some of which are in our control and some of which are out of our control.

As a NC Wildlife officer and the Director of WRC, I was appalled when I was informed that you issued an order to your officers to take enforcement actions against anglers for fishing or transporting fish in joint waters during an open season that was adopted in 2022, approved by the RRC, subjected to legislative review, and codified in the NCAC months prior to your proclamation. This order was verified by Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) Colonel Whitten on Tuesday, September 6th, in a phone call with WRC Colonel Meyer. I was hoping that there was some miscommunication, but that hope dissipated when I received copies of warning citations issued by DMF officers to the angling public for

“transport fish not in compliance w/ body of water.” Furthermore, these citations were issued to anglers in joint waters on WRC boat ramps.

These actions are completely unacceptable, unprofessional, and likely unlawful. I, under no circumstances, would order a law enforcement officer to take criminal action against the public when the public is acting under the regulations set by another State agency. Not only is it unfair to the public, but it is also unfair to our officers and could likely result in their interactions with the public escalating, even to the point of requiring the use of deadly force. Putting these officers, and other officers responding to requests for assistance, in these potentially dangerous situations is completely avoidable. To be fair to the public and to protect all law enforcement officers, WRC officers will not be taking similar criminal actions against the angling public during the season you announced in joint waters that begins on September 15th.

With this letter, I am asking you and DMF to take immediate action to stop the actions your officers have been directed to take on our constituents that are lawfully fishing in joint and inland waters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Cameron Ingram", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cameron Ingram, Executive Director
North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission