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**Statement from Maryland Department of Natural Resources Secretary John Griffin
on Active Conservation Law Enforcement Investigations
February 16, 2011**

Some recent public statements by lawmakers and members of the media have implied that the Maryland Natural Resources Police may have acted improperly during their investigations of criminal violations of fisheries laws. Those implications are completely false, and are especially troubling because the officers are unable to defend themselves; to do so would require disclosure of details that would seriously compromise these investigations.

The Natural Resource Police have statewide authority to enforce all State laws and investigate all suspected criminal activity. When officers have enough information to believe certain investigative techniques are needed, they take the information to the Circuit Court, where a judge determines whether there is sufficient evidence to establish probable cause that criminal activity is taking place. If probable cause is determined, the judge may then issue a warrant authorizing investigative techniques for the police to follow during the investigation.

If the investigation results in an arrest, defense attorneys will have access to all details of the warrant and investigative techniques, and the trial judge will determine whether the evidence was gathered properly. The proper place for examination of these investigative procedures is the courtroom, after the investigation is completed — not in the press or through public debate during a criminal investigation, when all the facts cannot be disclosed.

The publicity surrounding current criminal investigations has already alerted lawbreakers, thus reducing the chances of their being caught while committing these crimes. Disclosure of any more detail would further compromise active investigations of these serious crimes.

The egregious poaching activities uncovered over the past few weeks — through the outstanding work of our NRP officers — have served to underscore the critical, urgent importance of apprehending any and all who would violate the public trust, stealing from our law abiding watermen, our citizens and our future.

The Department of Natural Resources stands behind and in full support of our Natural Resources Police officers, who are following proper procedures in compliance with the law. And we most respectfully ask that Maryland's lawmakers, in their critical role as keepers of the public trust, support our conservation officers and allow them to conduct these investigations on behalf of the citizens of our State. To do otherwise further jeopardizes the integrity of criminal investigations, the health of our fragile resources, and the safety of our law enforcement officers.

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