



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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## **No Changes Slated for Tournament in 2013**

The 56th annual Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament, which opens January 1, 2013 and runs throughout the year, will see no modifications in its popular Citation program. At its annual meeting last month the Tournament Committee reviewed the minimum and maximum qualifying standards for a number of different species. A downward trend was noted in Citation numbers of croaker, flounder, spot and gray trout while an upward trend was seen for red drum, speckled trout and striped bass. Following this review the Committee voted to maintain the current qualifying standards. "The Tournament Committee, once again, reaffirmed their stance regarding the current minimum qualifying standards as representing a true trophy catch that warrants recognition by the Tournament even as the population size structure changes within a species," stated Tournament Director Lewis Gillingham.

The Committee also discussed a request from the angling public to re-establish a release Citation for black sea bass. Most recently the closed period for black sea bass has overlapped the time of year when anglers "deep-drop" in search for blueline tilefish and other deepwater species. Large black sea bass are often encountered but must be released because of the closed season. The request would allow the recognition of a trophy catch even though the fish must legally be released. The Committee all too well understood the public concern about the long closed season. They also recognized that most of the larger sea bass were caught in deep water and most, or nearly all, black sea bass pulled from deepwater (greater than 100 feet) would not survive. For this reason the Committee did not support re-instating a release Citation for the species. The Committee observed some anglers may intentionally target large sea bass just for the release award even though the season is closed and the fish must legally be released and would likely die.

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The Tournament Committee made major changes to the Program in 2004, instituting release Citations for all species and increasing the qualifying minimums for more than a dozen species. In recent years, the Committee has attempted to fine tune individual minimum qualifying weights and lengths to coincide with historical trophy-fish standards.

Other popular programs administered by the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament, such as the Junior Angler Program, and the Expert and Master Angler programs, will return unchanged in 2013. The Junior Angler Program challenges children less than 16 years of age to catch and release six species of saltwater fish. To qualify as an Expert Angler a fisherman must register fish in at least six different species for Citation awards during the year. Master Angler requirements are 25 Citations (with a maximum of one per species per year) in at least five different species over an unlimited period of time starting in 1996.

On another note, anglers should check their current saltwater fishing license for its expiration date before heading out on the water in 2013, as saltwater fishing licenses are now valid for 365 days from the date of purchase. Anglers must have a valid Virginia saltwater fishing license. Again in 2013, those anglers 16 years of age and older but not required to purchase a saltwater fishing license (such as those anglers over 65 years of age or anglers fishing on another angler's licensed vessel) must register with the Virginia Fisherman Identification Program (it is free and can be done online at [www.mrc.virginia.gov/FIP](http://www.mrc.virginia.gov/FIP) ). Anglers are also advised to pay attention to all 2013 fishery regulations as they are announced. All applicable fisheries regulations must be adhered to and a saltwater fishing license is required for Tournament participation. In addition, anglers fishing the territorial sea south of the Virginia border for striped bass are reminded these are North Carolina waters and anglers must have a valid North Carolina saltwater fishing license. Virginia does not have a reciprocity agreement with North Carolina and the Virginia saltwater license will not be accepted in North Carolina waters.

The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament is a program of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission funded with revenues from Virginia's saltwater fishing license. The Tournament offers handsome wooden wall Citation plaques or album sized certificates for 35 species of saltwater fish which meet minimum criteria. The Tournament operates all year. For more information, contact Lewis S. Gillingham, Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament, 2600 Washington Avenue, Third Floor, Newport News, VA 23607, (757) 491-5160, (757)247-8014 (fax), or [vswft@mrc.virginia.gov](mailto:vswft@mrc.virginia.gov)