

Draft Minutes
Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament
Committee Meeting
October 10, 2002

Members Present

Claude Bain
B. W. Beauchamp
Nancy Cobb
Dave Elliott
Bill Hall
Jon Lucy
Ken Neill
Hank Norton
Christine Snook
Richard Welton

Members Absent

Charles Lovell
Charles Randolph
John Thurston

Public Attendees

David Barbee
Bill Manshreck
Mark Snook
Lee Tolliver
Al Wild

The Meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Tournament Director Claude Bain.

The committee members were introduced to the public attendees, and Claude Bain gave a general introduction into the state budget shortfall and its potential impact upon the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament (VSWFT). Mr. Bain then stated a public comment period would ensue for input from meeting attendees on the VSWFT programs, budget, and policy with the Committee Meeting to follow during which public comment would not be allowed.

Bill Manshreck addressed the Committee first, stating he represented surf and pier fishermen and the many minority fishermen who did not have boats. He felt it was important to allow these fishermen to keep 2 small flounder (13-14 inches), so they would have something to take home and eat after a day of pier fishing. He felt there should be a lower size limit or tolerance for 2 small flounder for pier and surf fishermen. Mr. Bain stated this type of action was not under the purview of this Committee; this request should be addressed to the full Marine Resources Commission in Newport News. Mr. Bain also stated that Ken Neill was a member of FMAC and this request could go before that Committee. He agreed to forward the request to Jack Travelstead.

David Barbee stated he represented the Northampton County Anglers Club and his group fully supported the VSWFT and its programs. They would be willing to assist in any way with campaigns to keep the program from have to undergo serious change or cutbacks in the current budgetary climate.

Al Wilder stated he was attending the meeting to assist in the appeal of his wife's rejected Citation from 2001.

There being no other public comment, Mr. Bain closed the public comment period.

Mr. Bain then stated the Committee would proceed to the Agenda, but would consider the appeals of rejected Citations first (Item X) since Mr. Wilder was in attendance.

X. Appeals of Rejected Citations

Judy Wilder was seeking a Citation for a blue marlin release July 4, 2001. Affidavit forms from the angler, captain and two witnesses attested to the catch, release and filling out of the Citation application form. No copy of the form has been found. Mr. Beauchamp moved the Citation be accepted, seconded by Mr. Welton, passed 10-0.

Jeff Vlk registered a croaker for a Citation at Headhunters Headquarters – a freshwater weigh station and filled out freshwater forms. After the initial rejection of the entry, a friend obtained saltwater forms from Greentop and had them completed at Headhunters. Rejected again due to several rules violations. After these attempts Vlk contacted VSWFT and filled out affidavit explaining what he did and admitting wrong trying to “bypass” our system. Mr. Elliott moved not to accept Citation, seconded by Mr. Welton, passed 10-0.

Review of five Citations never received by VSWFT office from VA Beach Fishing Center from boat “My Susan”. Citation for Dell Dean was completed and lost and affidavits from angler and captain attesting to the fact were filed. Mr. Welton moved to accept this Citation, seconded by Mr. Beauchamp, passed 10-0. Four Citations applications (3 white marlin and 1 blue marlin) were never completed by the anglers. Boat was late returning to the dock due to long fight with blue marlin, VA Beach Fishing Center was closed, the anglers did not know the rules or much about the program and returned to their homes (Kenbridge, Richmond, Glen Allen) without filling out Citation applications. Applications were never filled out until Capt. Brian Foley pursued the problem with the VSWFT office. Affidavits and applications were subsequently completed and filed. Dave Elliott stated rules had to be followed and the anglers did not make an effort to get Citation even though there are weigh stations in Richmond and Glen Allen. Mr. Welton moved not to accept Citations, seconded by Mr. Beauchamp, passed 10-0.

IX. Weigh Station Application

Mr. Bain stated Agenda item IX would be considered next, since it was a related request from the Brian Foley, captain of the My Susan, to become a weigh station. The My Susan docks with approximately 6 boats at Southside Marina (an adjunct of the VB Fishing Center which accommodates boats too tall to get under the Rudee Inlet bridge). Foley would like to weigh fish for his clients and would assist other boats at Southside Marina, since it is an inconvenience to have to travel to the VB Fishing Center to register fish. Mr. Welton asked what criteria

are used to establish weigh stations. Mr. Bain stated all applications are accepted that meet two criteria: 1) there must be established place of business open to the public; and 2) the business must have regular, scheduled hours of operation. Mr. Neill suggested the VB Fishing Center could set up a stand at Southside. It was then pointed out that Bill Dixon was quick to appear and pump fuel for boats at Southside and could and did bring Citation materials. Problems with late returns to the dock are not unique to Southside Marina and the anglers must take some responsibility in getting Citations. Mr. Elliott stated the criteria are good and provide for good service to the public and moved not to accept a weigh station at Southside Marina that fell outside of VSWFT guidelines; seconded by Mrs. Snook, and passed 10-0.

I. VSWFT Budget

Mr. Bain reviewed the VSWFT budget, which is set at \$199,000 annually, but which needed an additional \$20,000 in 2001 due to the record number of Citations. Mr. Bain said state budget shortfalls were severely impacting the VSWFT's parent agency (Marine Resources Commission) and that the VSWFT, even though it is specially funded with license revenues, is a part of the budget process and must look to keeping its budget in line with guidelines being proposed. The agenda listed the main programs of the VSWFT, and Mr. Bain suggested the Committee review each program with an eye towards its contribution to the overall purposes of the VSWFT and how it fit into long term plans and goals. Mr. Bain suggested the Committee refer to the budgetary program reviews in the Committee packages to help with the analysis.

1. Mr. Bain introduced the scale loan program with a review of its initial cost, and its escalating maintenance costs as the scales age, require more maintenance and have to be replaced. The program was introduced to bring uniformity at weigh stations and to provide scales capable of weighing fish accurately in relatively small weight variations (1 ounce increments). Mr. Bain detailed the substantial amount of time involved with this program (a scale breaks in Deltaville, he must pick it up, take it to be repaired and return it), as well as the annual checks which must be made upon all scales. Mr. Neill stated the VSWFT should get out of the scale business. Mrs. Snook stated her scale was not reading properly now and she is using her own digital scale. Mr. Beauchamp asked who certified scales, and Mr. Bain replied that the VSWFT does, although it was not done last year due to budget and personnel constraints. Ms. Cobb stated as a weigh station she did not mind putting up the money to buy a scale to be a weigh station. She thought uniformity was good, but it was not too much to ask weigh stations to shoulder responsibility for maintenance costs and repairs. She would like to be able to keep the scales on a loan or rental basis, and she would maintain them. Mr. Elliott stated the scales were state property and could not be left with the weigh stations if the scale loan program was ended. Mr. Bain stated that was true, that the scales would have to be "surplused" if the program was

ended , although it might be possible to work out a sale to the weigh stations which wanted to keep their scales at a reasonable, negotiated price. The rest of the scales would have to be picked up and “surplused. Mr. Elliott moved to end the scale loan program as it currently exists, leaving the scales on loan to weigh stations indefinitely with weigh stations required to maintain and repair the scale at their expense; for weigh stations that did not want to operate under this arrangement, the VSWFT would pick up their scales and they could supply their own scales if they wished to continue as weigh stations. This motion was seconded by Mr. Welton and passed 10-0.

2. Mr. Bain introduced the annual awards program recognizing the anglers catching the largest fish, or having the most releases, in each eligible Tournament species. This award is in addition to the Citation plaque the angler receives. Mr. Bain reviewed several controversies which have developed over these award in the last two years, although no official protests were filed. Mr. Hall stated this program promotes competitive angling, which the VSWFT has been moving away from in recent years, in favor programs providing “recognition not competition”. Mr. Beauchamp stated virtually all controversies in recent years have related to competitive angling programs and the VSWFT should continue moving away from such program. Mr. Neill agreed, but stated it was a shame that programs which have been a good program addition in the past have generated negative feelings among portions of the public. Mr. Welton stated competition brings controversy and the temptation and incentive for anglers to break rules. Mr. Elliott asked about the effect on the state record program, to which Mr. Bain responded they were separate issues and would not be affected by an decision to end annual awards. Ms. Cobb stated the VSWFT should stick to basics – recognizing outstanding catches with Citation awards; this is the real tourism and promotional value of the program, while the individual awards are really for a much more select group of avid, local anglers. Mr. Welton stated we have to remember the locals are our constituency also, since they buy licenses, and must consider that in administering the program. Mr. Bain stated we must consider the role the state should play in angling awards programs and competitive angling situations – what is the proper amount of competition to sanction; should we strive for programs with broad recognition of accomplishments which any number of people may meet and leave competitive, one winner programs to the tournaments and clubs, or some other combination. Mr. Hall stated the proper role for the VSWFT was to design programs of recognition without inherent competition, and moved to stop giving annual awards. This was seconded by Mr. Lucy and passed 10-0.
3. Mr. Bain summarized the Master and Expert Angler programs of the VSWFT. Mr. Hall stated these are non-competitive recognition programs which the VSWFT should continue to promote. Mr. Neill stated if needed to cut budget, you could establish the expert angler as a one-time award (once you achieve expert angler status, you cannot get award aagain), but keep the master angler

as an ongoing award program with several achievement levels. Mr. Bain stated that was possible, but not a significant budget item; also, might want to consider not changing too many programs in a single year. Ms. Cobb stated we should keep the programs. Mr. Hall moved to keep the programs, seconded by Mr. Welton, passed 10-0.

4. Mr. Bain introduced the Chesapeake Bay Grand Slam award by stating no one has ever earned this award, so it has not been a budget consideration. However, the cost to design the initial award, should it be accomplished, to print certificates and manufacture a minimal number of awards would be substantial – at least \$2000 (1% of budget). Mr. Hall moved to end Chesapeake Bay Grand Slam, seconded by Mrs. Snook, passed 10-0. Mr. Welton stated he was pleased with the ending of this award because he did not like the format; he felt it should recognize catch and release of citation cobia, black drum and red drum within a single year not a single day. Mr. Bain stated he liked the idea of a grand slam award for an annual accomplishment of this nature, but this was too easy; a better award would be for citation releases for red drum, black drum cobia and striped bass in a year, since they represent all the “big” game fish of the Bay. When budgets allow, this award should be revisited.
5. Mr. Bain introduced the Junior Angler award. Committee consensus that this is one of the most important awards of the VSWFT. Ms. Cobb stated it is “growing new anglers and customers”. Ms. Cobb moved to keep the award, seconded by Mr. Beauchamp, passed 10-0.
6. Mr. Bain introduced the possibility of reducing the number of Citations issued by raising Citation standards. Record numbers of Citations in two of the last three years and large numbers this year have put great pressure on recent budgets. Increased demand for and emphasis on the release program is causing Citation numbers to grow rapidly. There is a need to ensure our standards truly reflect angling accomplishment. Mr. Bain stated there was some good news on the Citation front for the current year: the bid for plaques was received and is \$.50 per plaque board less than last year, and the cost of printing Citation certificates is over 50% less than the prior year. The cost per plaque will be at least \$.60 less this year. Unfortunately, shipping costs account for 50% of the cost of Citation plaques, so an increase in UPS costs could offset the savings. Mr. Welton stated we should look to cut Citation numbers by 10%, but the Committee was not informed enough to do it at the current meeting so a Subcommittee should be appointed for the task. Mrs. Snook suggested listing all releases for an angler for the year on one plaque and all the weight Citations for an angler for the year on a single plaque. Mr. Bain stated this idea was suggested on internet message boards and has merit, but the biggest problem is designing a single certificate which would look good with one Citation listed or 8 listed. A blank area would be needed on the certificate to list fish, weights, etc., and large variations in the space needed

would appertain depending on the number of different qualifying species an angler had caught. Mr. Welton stated he did not have a problem with budget moves the Committee had adopted so far, but take away the plaques for Citation catches and that would create problems. Mr. Hall stated the mission of the VSWFT is to recognize “trophy” catches and that should control Citation minimums, not arbitrary budget considerations. Mr. Welton stated that while this was mostly true, the Committee has used less stringent standards for release awards to encourage conservation. Consensus among members that unless no other ways to meet an absolute budget reduction requirement, trophy-size should be determinant of Citation minimums. Mr. Hall moved to let trophy-size considerations control Citation standards, not arbitrary percentage budget cuts , seconded by Mr. Neill, and passed 10-0.

7. Mr. Bain introduced another cost saving possibility involving mailing costs. Currently, the VSWFT supplied weigh stations with postage paid envelopes in which to mail citations to the VSWFT office. Possible to have weigh station complete application, then give the original to the angler to mail (at the angler’s expense) to the VSWFT office. Ms. Cobb asked why not have the weigh station pay for the postage. Mrs. Snook stated her weigh station does a large volume of Citations and postage costs would be high; many anglers just weigh their fish and do not buy anything, so while program certainly helps business it does not always; anglers should absorb mailing costs if program does not cover them. Mr. Neill stated having originals in angler’s control creates the opportunity for them to alter the form. Mr. Welton reminded the committee not all weigh stations were mailing entries on a timely basis, how good would the public be; instead of 110 places mailing forms, you would have forms coming from 3000 people. Mr. Hall felt this should be considered only if there were no other way. Mr. Welton stated a chain is only as strong as the weakest, and this would create thousands of weak links. Mr. Hall mad a motion to continue the current system, seconded by Mrs. Snook, passed 10-0.
8. Mr. Bain introduced the idea of reducing some printing costs associated with the program. The Tournament brochure would be cut to 8 pages from 12 pages, for example. The VSWFT might also consider cutting down the number or eliminating “stick-on” rulers. Committee endorsed the brochure reduction and simplifying information, but felt the “stick-on” should continue to be produced.
9. Mr. Welton brought up the storage of the VSWFT boat at Marina Shores. He stated the boat usage had declined to a minimal level and might best be shelved until a new boat was feasible for the program. Mr. Bain stated that for the most part this was true, that most writer and media trips, which had been cut back substantially due to budget and time constraints, had been effected through arrangements with other captains who had better boats for the trip targets. It was agreed this was a possible avenue if more cuts needed.

II. Possible Change in Citation Standards to Inches

Mr. Bain introduced a concept which has been mentioned at several prior Committee meetings – changing the standard for measuring Citations from pounds and ounces to inches. He stated timing was right, if this is the direction the program wishes to take due to the ending of the scale loan program. It would be tough to require new weigh stations to buy scales, then change Citation standard to inches a year from now. The change would simplify the program through easier maintenance of the measuring device (a board vs. a scale) and there would be no problems associated with weigh stations using scales that are broken or out of calibration.

Mr. Elliott said the idea had merit, but suggested studying it for a year; Mr. Bain should go out to the public and solicit their input and reaction, similar to the way the VSWFT did when offering an optional paper award. Mr. Neill said his club (Peninsula Saltwater Sportfishing Assn.) adopted the inch standard for their awards 3 years ago and member support is mixed (about 50/50); they did it to allow entry of released fish. Mr. Neill reviewed the VSWFT proposal with people at Wallace' Bait & Tackle and found little support; also found that three different people got three different measurements for a fish. Mr. Hall and Mr. Bain stated that slight variations in measurements were a definite problem. Ms. Cobb felt this would break with traditional and, more importantly, break the continuity of the information generated for 45 years. Mr. Elliott asked about state records and other state programs. Mr. Bain replied state records would continue to be measured in pounds and ounces. Maryland has adopted inches for all Citation measurements (releases and kills); Delaware has weight or length measures for all species; North Carolina is weight only with a small release program. VSWFT, with its expanding release program, almost has an inch standard as an alternative.

Mr. Neill stated that any use of inches as a standard would have to truly reflect trophy size. Mr. Welton stated the smaller sizes now in use are to encourage release and conservation of big, breeding females. Mr. Beauchamp said it is easier for people to understand a fish is big using pounds instead of inches; he used the example of the average person visualizing a 49-pound dolphin versus a 60 inch dolphin. Mr. Welton stated non-anglers he takes fishing always ask two questions during a trip: how deep is the water and how much does that fish weigh. Mr. Hall asked where this idea was coming from. Mr. Bain stated it came from his initiative, based upon observations that increased numbers of regulations have anglers starting to think in inches: when asked about the success of a trip, most standard answers involve "I got a limit of flounder/striped bass/speckled trout, and two were 24 inches/40 inches/23 inches". This triggered thinking about Citation standards and the ease and flexibility of the use of inches as a Citation standard. In addition, measuring boards do not break or go out of calibration, which provides an easy standard with low maintenance costs. No motion was made, so the item was not considered, although Mr. Elliott again stated this should be studied for a year.

Ms. Snook brought up a related matter involving release Citations, namely what can we do to allow releases for people fishing alone. Mr. Welton suggested use of a photograph of fish on a ruler if the rest of tournament rules were complied with (including the entry within 7 days of date of catch). Ms. Cobb stated it was a good time to consider, since rewriting brochure and rules. Several members then mentioned possible scenarios for altered rulers or measurements. Mr. Elliott stated this had potential but there might be some problems and he moved the idea be tabled and studied for a year and voted upon in 2003; this was seconded by Mr. Norton and passed 10-0. Mr. Bain asked why study and what should be studied; you have to trust in the honesty of the angling public, and the VSWFT relies on honesty and self-policing now. Mr. Welton stated you should study the proper way to measure and document the measurement of the fish by using photographs of various scenarios. Mr. Neill stated you basically had to determine if the camera was going to qualify as a substitute witness and if the public was in favor of it.

III. Dolphin Citation

Mr. Bain reviewed recent trends in the dolphin fishery, including the record year for Citations in 2002, and discussed whether the Citation minimum should be raised. Mr. Elliott stated that a one-year spike was not enough to justify a change. Mr. Lucy concurred. Mr. Neill felt a 25 pound dolphin was a better measure of a trophy given the size attained by the fish. Mr. Hall stated there seemed to be a big difference in average size from the Washington Canyon to the north. Mr. Bain stated that size differential was reflected in Citation minimums, with North Carolina requiring a 35# minimum, but only 15# in Delaware; the 35 inch minimum in Maryland is equivalent to a small fish, approx. 15#. Overall, citation numbers have been trending higher last two years. Ms. Cobb stated should wait another year before changing. Mr. Welton stated 2002 appeared to be an abnormal spike, but there are reasons to raise it. Mr. Bain introduced up a table with inch measures for various weights, but the idea of any consideration of a release Citation was tabled due to the volatile nature of the dolphin in a boat cockpit. Mr. Hall moved to reconsider this next year, seconded by Mr. Beauchamp, passed 10-0.

IV. Review changes made to minimum weights for Flounder & Spadefish in 2002

Mr. Bain reviewed flounder Citation numbers for 2002. The 2002 total of 524 through October 9, 2002 compared to 1022 for the same period the prior year. When the Committee raised the minimum from 6 to 7 pounds last year, projections were for Citations to drop approximately 55%. These numbers verify those predictions. Mr. Bain stated overall the flounder fishery was not nearly as robust as the prior year, as reflected in MRFSS data, tagging success in the Virginia Game Fish Tagging Program, and angler observations. That was mainly due to the smaller numbers of medium size fish, not trophy fish. This could have an impact on future Citation numbers, although continued effective management

should prevent a crash in trophy fish similar to the early 1980's. Mr. Welton felt the ability of the program to predict Citation numbers in this case was not an anomaly and were about right for the fishery. Mr. Elliott agreed the VSWFT had made the correct move for flounder Citations and should remain at 7 pounds.

Mr. Bain reviewed the spadefish numbers for 2002, which showed 203 spadefish Citations for fish 9 pounds or larger. Mr. Hall stated this was in large measure due to very large fish early in the year. Committee consensus that the 9 pound level is right for spadefish.

V. Review 2002 Inclusion of Tautog, Spadefish & Gray Trout in Release Program

Mr. Bain reviewed tautog release Citation numbers, totaling 196, and total tautog Citation numbers, which are up substantially over prior ten years. Increase due in large measure to warm winter and good tautog fishing in January-March time period. Angler input indicated 21-inch release was too small, often pertaining to fish of under 8 pounds. Mr. Neill stated change in ASMFC regulations will result in some prime time closures next year and will affect fishing. Mr. Beauchamp suggested leaving at 21 inches, since it would help protect large females. Mr. Welton stated the savings would be minimal; with a few exceptions tautog fishermen are "meat" fishermen, attempting to get a limit of fish, and limits will generally be taken, if available. Mr. Lucy thought erring on side of conservation best for VSWFT. Mr. Welton felt increasing release size to 22 inches in response to input from anglers was appropriate, and Ms. Cobb agreed that best for VSWFT to respond to request for "trophy-status" release. Ms. Snook moved to increase release for tautog to 22 inches, seconded by Mr. Beauchamp, passed 10-0.

Mr. Bain introduced information on spadefish release Citations, including numbers to show that vast majority of releases were listed at 21 inches. Raising the minimum would eliminate most releases. Population of big spadefish seemed to surge two years ago, and may be at a short term peak. Mr. Neill stated many of the releases listed at 21 inches were probably smaller – 18" or 19" based upon experience and input regarding size range found at Light Tower. Mr. Hall commented on the huge fish found in the middle of the Bay in May and June. Discussion proceeded on problems with measuring spadefish and angler accuracy and commitment to proper measurements. Mrs. Snook stated this was one species where the release Citation was the equivalent to the kill weight; mostly we try to encourage release. With 427 spadefish Citations for 2002, of which 223 are releases, the Committee felt the Citations numbers for a species not as heavily targeted as many Bay favorites (flounder, croaker, spot) was at the upper end of a "trophy-size" range, but no change in release size was warranted.

Mr. Bain introduced the gray trout Citation data showing a total of 56 (33 kills, 23 releases) which compared to 71 kills at same time prior year. Water temperature warmer and fall run may be slightly delayed, but overall number of trophy fish

has not shown the growth he expected after population resurgence of recent years and large numbers of 3-4 pound fish began appearing 4-5 years ago. Mr. Welton stated the stock size is growing, management appears to be holding fairly tight rein on catches, and VSWFT must prepare for a surge in bigger trout at some time in the near future. Mr. Neill stated ASMFC proposal might see commercial harvest go up, while the recreational harvest would be curtailed; this seemingly unfair result could impact Citation numbers in the future. Mr. Hall stated that in the current environment 9 pounds and 30 inches were good measures of trophy gray trout. No change was warranted.

- VI. Mr. Bain introduced the request from the public for a barracuda Citation. Similar to crevalle jacks a few years ago with apparently an increasing number of fish appearing in local waters in recent years, and they are a “game” fish. Mr. Welton stated must be release only since fish virtually inedible. Mr. Elliott said no additions to program in year with budget problems, and Mr. Bain agreed it was prudent. Mr. Hall moved not to add to the program this year, seconded by Mr. Beauchamp, passed 10-0.
- VII. Mr. Bain introduced public requests for release Citations for flounder and croaker, Including length-weight tables. Mr. Welton stated adding releases always increases number of Citations issued, and no expansion of the program was warranted in a year with budget problems despite public desire and the VSWFT commitment to expanding release program. Mr. Elliott moved not to include these releases in the program in 2003, seconded by Mrs. Snook, passed 10-0.
- VIII. Mr. Bain introduced the request for a senior division in angling awards programs, Stating the proponent had called to indicate the timing was bad with the budget problems. Mr. Welton moved not to consider it this year, seconded by Mr. Lucy, passed 10-0.
- XI. Mr. Bain discussed a rules conflict stating he would be adding a tournament rule specifically allowing publication of all information gathered by VSWFT; also, he would work to consolidate and simplify rules.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:05 pm.