



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

*Marine Resources Commission
2600 Washington Avenue
Third Floor
Newport News, Virginia 23607*

Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament
2600 Washington Avenue
Newport News, Virginia 23607
(757) 491-5160
vswft@mrc.virginia.gov

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Anglers Top 6000 Citations for the Second Year in a Row

Anglers registered 6,167 trophy-size fish for Citation awards during the 56th Annual Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament that ran from January 1st through December 31st 2013. This was the ninth time anglers had achieved 6,000 or more Citations in any year since the Tournament began in 1958 and the most since 2007.

Speckled trout accounted for the greatest number of Citations among the 35 eligible species in 2013 with a total of 1,874 awards with 1,198 (64%) releases and 676 (36%) kills. Trophy specks represented a whopping 36% of the year's awards. The 2013 total was easily the highest in the Tournament's history and only the third year when anglers collected 1,000 or more awards for speckled trout. The other years were in 2012 (1279 Citations) and 2008 (1065 Citations) and continues the trend for well above average numbers of these beautiful spotted fish that began in 2008. The Virginia's trophy speckled trout fishery is truly a year round fishery and Citation trout were registered in every month of the year in 2013. While the majority of speckled trout registered were released, of those that were killed, 15 fish topped the magic 10-pound mark and 66 fish weighed 8 pounds or more.

It was another spectacular year off the Virginia coast for white marlin as offshore anglers registered a record-setting 1,339 white marlin releases in 2013. White marlin accounted for the second most Citations and 22% of all Citations registered in 2013. This continued a trend of increasing numbers of white marlin that began in 2008. White marlin are only eligible for release so all of these beautiful billfish were released. In 2013 the marlin fishing was consistently good from mid-July through mid-October although the season's first white marlin was caught June 6 off Virginia Beach along the 100-Fathom Line where the last registered white marlin was caught November 22.

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Telephone (757) 247-2200 (757) 247-2292 V/TDD Information and Emergency Hotline 1-800-541-4646 V/TDD

Red drum accounted for the third highest number of Citations in 2013 and represented 13% of the year's total number. The 995 red drum Citations were the most ever recorded in a single year in the Program's history. Red drum Citations became "release only" in 2000, and coincidentally, that was the first time in Tournament history more than 500 Citation red drum were registered in a year. Since 2000, anglers have failed to register less than 500 reds in only two years, as management measures for the sought after red fish preclude the keeping of the large adult fish all along the Atlantic. The season for trophy-sized red drum is a long one in Virginia. The season's first red drum was caught near the baymouth at Smith Island on April 17 and within a few days the popular pastime blossomed into a consistent fishery that lasted well into October. The year's last trophy red drum was pulled from the Barrier Island surf on October 31.

Several species deserve honorable mention in the 2013 review. Bigeye tuna arguably made their best showing in Tournament history, as a considerable number of bigeye tipped the scales in excess of 200 pounds in 2013. However, due to the difficulty in identification of different species of tuna, bigeye tuna are lumped into the Tuna (other) category for Citations, so no exact count or comparison can be made between years. The unprecedented rush of bigeye tuna off the Virginia coast in 2013 was topped by a new state record bigeye of 311 pounds, caught by Vic Gaspeny at the Norfolk Canyon, on September 25. Other species making a decent showing in 2013 include tautog, as Citations were up significantly in 2013 and reached their highest level since 2006, as 184 tog were registered in 2013. Black sea bass Citation numbers topped 100 for the first time since 2008. Cobia Citations were up in 2013 with 162 fish registered plus anglers indicate fish in the 30 to 45-pound range were reasonably common, so anglers may see even better numbers of trophy-sized fish in 2014.

As good of a year as it was for some species the opposite was true for several popular inshore species. Perhaps the biggest disappointment for anglers in 2013 was the huge drop in striped bass Citations. Striped bass Citation numbers dropped from their second highest total in Tournament history in 2012 (1,331 Citations) to their lowest level since 1997 with just 441 Citation fish registered in 2013. This total included 112 fish (25 %) for release and 429 fish (75 %) for a kill, and accounted for 7 % of the year's total awards. Forty-one of the kill Citations were for fish 50 pounds or greater. The fishery suffered from windy and cold weather in January and February in 2013 as very few striped bass were available in Virginia's coastal waters during this time. Then in November and December the strong push of trophy-sized fish into Virginia waters simply did not materialize to the level common in recent years, leaving anglers scratching their heads as to the cause.

Flounder continued a downward trend, as just 61 flatfish were registered in 2013, their lowest total in 20 years. Spot meeting the minimum qualifying weight of 16 ounces have been very rare since 2006 but 2013 did produce decent numbers of hand-sized fish and a better year for large fish could be in store for 2014. No gray trout Citations were registered for a second year in a row, as a decreasing trend in trophy-sized trout has been evident since 2007. Spadefish meeting the Citation minimum were likewise very scarce in 2013. Croaker, one of the bottom fishermen's most popular targets in the Chesapeake Bay in recent years because of the long season and its abundance, saw their lowest number of Citation fish registered since 1993 with

just three fish in 2012, yet anglers could hardly drop a baited hook in the bay and not find a willing 6 to 8-inch croaker from early spring into late summer.

The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament is operated by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission with funding provided by the Virginia Saltwater Recreational Fishing License Fund. Awards are made to anglers catching fish meeting established weight criteria in 25 species while an additional 10 species meeting established length criteria are only available for release awards for a total of 35 species eligible for Citation recognition.

Citation awards are full color certificates delivered at the recipient's choice as a plaque or in a plastic album page. Special awards are presented to anglers meeting the eligibility requirements of the Master Angler and Expert Angler programs. The Program also administers the very popular Virginia Junior Angler award program, where any angler 15 years of age and younger can earn a special Virginia Junior Angler Award certificate by catching and releasing 6 different species of saltwater fish in Virginia during a calendar year.

For more information, contact Lewis S. Gillingham, Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament, 2600 Washington Ave.; Third Floor, Newport News, VA 23607, (757) 491-5160, vswft@mrc.virginia.gov