



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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

Molly Joseph Ward  
Secretary of Natural Resources

John M.R. Bull  
Commissioner

## **For Immediate Release**

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### Anglers Reel-in over 5000 Citations in 2014

Anglers registered 5,040 trophy-size fish for Citation awards during the 57th Annual Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament that ran from January 1st through December 31<sup>st</sup> 2014. This was slightly below the 10-year average (2004-2013) of 5,219 Citations and represents an 18% reduction in Citation number from 2013.

As they did in the record setting year of 2013, speckled trout accounted for the greatest number of Citations among the 35 eligible species in 2014 with a total of 1,476 awards with 1,034 (70%) releases and 441 (30%) kills. While the majority of speckled trout registered were released, of those that were killed, 11 fish topped the magic 10-pound mark and 56 fish weighed 8 pounds or more. Trophy specks represented 30% of the year's awards. Although the 2013 total was easily the highest in Tournament history at 1,874 Citation specks 2014 was the Tournament's second highest total. This continues the trend for well above average numbers of these beautiful spotted trophy fish that began in 2008. One reason for the drop in Citation numbers was the Virginia Marine Resources Commission closed the recreational speckled trout fishery from March 1 through July 31 following concerns raised by recreational anglers as a result of a winter cold stun event of large speckled trout in late January and early February 2013.

It was another spectacular year off the Virginia coast for white marlin as offshore anglers registered 928 white marlin releases in 2014 and this was the fourth highest total in Tournament history. However, following the record-setting year in 2013, when 1,339 white marlin releases registered, 2014 represented a reduction of 21%. Overall in 2014, white marlin accounted for the second most Citations and just over 18% of all Citations registered for the year. This continued a trend of well above average numbers of white marlin that began in 2008. White marlin are only eligible for release so all of these beautiful billfish were released.

Red drum accounted for the third highest number of Citations in 2014 and represented 18% of the year's total number. The 925 red drum Citations in 2014 was a moderate reduction from the record setting year of 2013, when 995 trophy reds were registered, but still ranks as the second most productive year in the Program's history. Red drum Citations became "release

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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 on the Shoals off Fishermen’s Island on May 2 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 around the CBBT on November 11.

Several species deserve honorable mention in the 2014 review. Shark Citation numbers topped 100 for the first time since 1989, even though only releases are offered. Cobia Citation numbers were up again in 2014, as anglers report fish in the 30 to 45-pound range were reasonably abundant and this bodes well for cobia hunters 2015.

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 2014 was lack of striped bass available in Virginia’s coastal waters in the months of December, January and February. Flounder Citation numbers remain at a historically low level although anglers did report more “keepers” were available in 2014. Spot meeting the minimum qualifying weight of 16 ounces have been very rare since 2006 and this trend continued in 2014. Only one gray trout Citation was registered in 2014, as a depressed trend in trophy-sized trout has been evident since 2007. Spadefish and croaker meeting the Tournament’s minimum qualifying criteria were again very scarce in 2014.

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 26 species while an additional 10 species meeting established length criteria are only available for release awards for a total of 36 species eligible for Citation recognition. As a reminder, golden tilefish were added to the list of species eligible for Citation awards. The minimum weight was set at 30 pounds but no release award is offered due to the extreme depths these bottom fish are pulled-up from and the associated high mortality rate due to barotrauma for released fish.

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](mailto:vswft@mrc.virginia.gov)