

**Draft Minutes**  
**Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament**  
**Committee Meeting**  
**October 25, 2006**

**Members Present**

Claude Bain  
B. W. Beauchamp  
David Elliott  
Bill Hall  
Jon Lucy  
Ken Neill  
Craig Paige  
Charles Randolph  
William Seymour  
Christine Snook

**Members Absent**

John Thurston  
Jerry Thrash

**Public Attendees**

Debbie Hurst  
Scott Payne  
Mark Wray  
Mark Snook  
Steve Wray

**VMRC Attendees**

Sonya Davis

At 6:50 pm Tournament Director Claude Bain welcomed the public to the meeting and called the meeting to order. A quorum for the meeting was noted and the reading of the minutes of the last meeting was not required.

Mr. Bain opened the public comment period, but no one wished to address the Committee. The public comment period was closed and the Committee moved to the first agenda item.

Mr. Bain introduced the review of the 2006 program by updating the Committee briefing package with a computer printout of the updated Citation totals through October 24, 2006. Since Committee members had the 2006 information in their packets and had several days to review the material, Mr. Bain suggested dispensing with a review of each individual species. Mr. Bain highlighted sheepshead, red drum, cobia, gray trout, croaker. Discussion of spot and flounder were reserved for later in the meeting since they were each separate agenda items. Craig Paige stated that the sheepshead Citation changes made for 2006 were good, and the weight and length standards were just right. Mr. Bain asked if there were any other species not discussed or that were not already on the agenda that members felt were worthy of detailed review.

Bill Hall mentioned that spearfish were on VSWFT state record eligible list and Citation program and needed some discussion. Mr. Bain stated that federal regulations made it illegal to possess spearfish and that they would have to be removed from state record program eligibility. Ken Neill informed the Committee that "hatchet" marlin have been confirmed as a new species of spearfish and that this may have some impact on regulations in the future. Mr. Neill also related a confirmed report about a big spearfish that was brought into Rudee Inlet in 2006 and some confusion about regulations and the state record program.

At 7:00 pm Mr. Bain noted the arrival of Steve Wray and asked if he would like to address the Committee; replying in the affirmative, Mr. Bain reopened the public comment period to allow Mr. Wray to speak.

Mr. Wray stated that he represented himself and had several comments derived from discussions at VA Beach Anglers Club and at his tackle shop. His suggestions included:

- Re-institute a release Citation for Spanish mackerel
- Return the spot Citation to 1 pound and re-institute a release
- Leave flounder Citation unchanged
- Allow estimated release length for yellowfin tuna
- Allow 44-inch release for black drum to discourage people from bringing in fish and trying to weigh them
- Add blueline tilefish to Citation program with a 10-pound minimum
- Add a general "grouper" category with a 15-pound minimum
- Establish standards for Committee members and weighmasters regarding weighing their own fish or direct customers fish

After asking if there were any other comments, Mr. Bain closed the public comment period and returned to the agenda.

Mr. Bain moved to item II, a review of the release program stating several species were removed last year. Mr. Randolph stated if the public was interested in releases for fish like Spanish mackerel, we should consider adding them back to the program. Mr. Paige stated the Committee reviewed this last year and felt in fish like mackerel (and other "fast" fish) the mortality would be high and they were not a good candidates for a program encouraging people to release them. Mr. Neill agreed that measuring a Spanish mackerel can present problems as they "beat themselves" against a board. Mr. Neill also stated that the yellowfin tuna release should have been an estimated length or there should be no release award because measuring is not practical.

There was some agreement that there was no difference in estimating the length for bluefin or a yellowfin tuna, but Mr. Neill pointed out that regulations on bluefin were so strict that many fish were required to be released. Mr. Bain stated that one has to be careful with estimated releases because it invites a casual attitude toward achieving the required measurement.

Mr. Randolph and Mr. Neill both pointed out that there were very few yellowfin registered for releases, almost all yellowfin are kept for food, and the small number of releases will not impact the program. Mr. Hall stated that not many yellowfin are caught that meet Citation minimums and the estimated release allows anglers to get Citations for fish that would not otherwise qualify and he did not see a need for a release category.

Mr. Neill moved to abolish the release Citation for yellowfin tuna; seconded by Mr. Beauchamp; passed 8-1 with Mr. Lucy dissenting.

The release Citation for spot was brought up and Mr. Neill suggested it be rolled into the spot agenda item; so, the Committee returned to a discussion of Spanish mackerel. Mr. Seymour agreed with earlier comments about difficulty in measuring Spanish. Mr. Bain offered a counterpoint that due to their size handling was easier than other mackerels and tunas and they

could be measured. Also, lures used in the Spanish mackerel fishery generally featured single hooks making hook removal somewhat easier.

Mr. Randolph stated if a release was allowed it probably should be lowered from prior levels due to the lowering of the weight Citation to 4 pounds last year. Mr. Bain countered that lowering too much risks awards for non-trophy fish. Continued discussion centered on sizes for fish 24 to 26 inches in size with a consensus that a 26-inch fish would weigh in the 4.5+ pound range. Mr. Bain stated that the importance of the release is to make sure it is a trophy.

Mr. Seymour moved to reinstitute a 26-inch release Citation for Spanish mackerel; seconded by Mr. Randolph; passed 9-0.

Mrs. Snook mentioned that several anglers had brought killed fish to her weigh station and wanted Citations based on the length measurement. Mr. Bain pointed to the Tournament brochure that clearly shows the length measurements are for released fish and that the issue is strictly an educational issue.

Mr. Bain moved forward to agenda item VI, and unveiled to the Committee the new Citation certificate that will list an angler's released fish and largest killed fish on one certificate. This is in response to a previously passed initiative from the Tournament Committee.

The next agenda item considered was III, relating to summer flounder. Mr. Bain reviewed the briefing papers and updated 2006 Citation data through October 24<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Bain spent a substantial amount of time on possible regulatory changes for 2007 and how that might impact the flounder fishery and Citation program. Mr. Elliott and Mr. Hall headed a consensus of Committee members who felt no change in the Citation minimums were warranted in the face of the current fishery and regulatory climate.

Mr. Neill moved to leave the flounder Citation minimums at current levels; seconded by Mr. Paige, who stated moving to 8 pounds would have a disproportionately large impact on Citation numbers; passed 9-0.

Mr. Bain introduced agenda item IV with a briefing on the spot fishery and update of Citation numbers through October 24<sup>th</sup>. A quick Committee consensus was reached that the Citation minimum should be lowered back to 1 pound. Mr. Neill stated that raising the Citation minimum to 1 lb., 2 oz. was good decision at the time, in fact the only decision that could be made given the huge number of Citation, but that is not the right level now. Mr. Bain reminded the Committee of that the largest spot fishery in the Commonwealth, the Rappahannock River fishery, has produced almost no Citations since raising minimum to 1 lb., 2oz., and the issue of upper Bay fisheries and participation in the program is always a consideration.

Mr. Beauchamp moved to lowered the spot Citation to 1 pound; seconded by Mr. Hall; passed 9-0. Mr. Hall and Mrs. Snook were recognized for their prediction when the Citation minimum was raised that the Committee would lower it back to a pound in a year or two.

Mr. Randolph started the discussion of reinstating a release Citation for a spot with a discussion of the weight of fish at the 12.5, 12.75 and 13 inch sizes. Mr. Neill stated he was opposed to a

release for “panfish”, but added the Tournament has kept a release for croaker – another panfish. He added program should be consistent in treatment of panfish.

Mr. Bain stated that there are plenty of people who do not eat spot or certain other fish, and they would like to have the option of releasing a trophy fish rather than killing it when they do not plan to eat it. Mr. Paige stated that 13 inches was the right size and would ensure that the fish were 1 pound or larger. He added that surf fishing tournaments are release events and the VA Beach event has a large number of spot caught by participants and they should be eligible for Citation they catch in a release event. More discussion ensued about the appropriate size.

Mr. Bain stated that the importance of the release was to provide anglers who do not wish to eat spot a target or goal. The size does not have to match up with the weight (in fact it cannot always correlate); it is just important if a release is adopted to ensure the size is a trophy specimen. There is no reason the release size in inches could not correlate to a larger size than adopted for the kill; the importance is in providing that target or opportunity.

Mr. Elliott moved to adopt 13-inch size for a spot release; seconded by Mr. Beauchamp; passed 9-0.

Mr. Bain introduced agenda item V by reviewing the briefing materials on blueline tilefish. This agenda item is the result of a request from the public for their inclusion in the program.

Mr. Hall stated activity in the fishery and recent world records makes inclusion in the state record program a necessity. Mr. Beauchamp stated those same arguments could be used for inclusion in the Citation program. Mr. Neill stated that not all fish in state record program should be in Citation program.

Mr. Hall stated we have criteria we use to evaluate inclusion in Citation program and the use of Electramates (electric reels) is a potential problem. Mr. Paige stated that accessibility to the fishery is the big issue, since they are caught so far offshore in such deep water and that could make the fish not a good Citation program candidate.

Mr. Neill summarized his view of the fishery, stating: 1) this is not a new fishery; charterboats have deep-dropped for years when offshore fishing has been poor to get customers some fish to take home; 2) recreational fishery has been very small, but it started to grow this year; 3) it is not hard to do and does not take expensive equipment; 4) the downsides are potential usage of electric reels and distance to grounds; 5) adding a Citation will increase the interest and fishing effort. He added that he did not have strong feelings for or against adding a Citation.

Mr. Bain stated that much of the charterboat participation in the past utilized Electramates.

Mr. Paige stated that the publicity from IGFA records will advance this fishery. Likely to become more active over the next couple of years. Saltwater Sportsman will have a major feature on the Virginia fishery this year and the annual publication of the IGFA is slated to have a feature article on the Virginia tilefish fishery.

Mr. Neill addressed potential management issues stating they are slow-growing, long-lived fish with no regulations off Virginia coast. From North Carolina south they are part of snapper-

grouper complex with a 10 fish in aggregate limit. NMFS has noticed the Virginia fishery and regulatory change is likely. Current catches off Virginia are very large, as anglers catch many fish looking to get record-size fish. Mr. Neill restated his belief that the Citation program should not be a management tool; that is for managers through regulation. Citation for tilefish should be based on criteria for VSWFT program not management issues. Mr. Neill went on to state that adding a Citation for tilefish would not be adding it to the program for just one boat (sic Jil Carrie) that the fishery is larger and interest is growing.

Mr. Bain stated that Mr. Neill was right about this issue – the evaluation should rest upon whether the Committee wants tilefish in the program based upon our criteria; not other tangential issues.

Mr. Randolph asked what would be an appropriate Citation size. Mr. Neill responded that 10 pounds would be a good fish, stating that the world record for blueline tilefish stood at the 10-pound mark for many years.

Discussion shifted to the size appropriate for the initial state record. Mr. Bain disagreed with suggestions that would set the minimum below the current world all-tackle record size, because the world all-tackle record comes from Virginia and he did not want a state record smaller than the world record since both would originate from the same jurisdiction. Mr. Neill felt larger fish larger than the current world record would be caught soon, citing 20-pound fish noted to have been caught in the past.

Mr. Bain was asked about adopting the current world record as the state record. He responded that there is precedent for that with the program. When shark records were broken down by species, the Committee adopted the “state records” kept by the Virginia Beach Sharkers as the official state records. Mr. Neill asked if that was really adoption of club records and Mr. Bain responded that the Sharkers verified and certified shark records for anyone submitting the proper application – not just club members and that several of their state records were held by non-members. John Thurston ran the program and their requirements were as stringent as those used by VSWFT. Since the world record tilefish was broken 6 times by Virginia fish in 2006, some Committee members questioned the fairness of recognizing just the last record. Mr. Hall stated the pompano was granted state record status without being on the “state record eligibility list”, so maybe the same would be appropriate for tilefish. Mr. Bain stated that occurred prior to having an eligibility list and prompted the adoption of criteria for state record inclusion. Mr. Bain reminded members that whatever actions are taken, precedents are established and they need to be careful to be consistent in their decisions.

Mr. Seymour moved to add blueline tilefish to the state record program with an 18-pound minimum for initial state record and to add blueline tilefish to the Citation program with a 10-pound minimum. Mr. Randolph seconded.

Mr. Beauchamp asked how common 10-pound blueline tilefish were. Mr. Neill stated that a fish that size was a “good” fish. Further discussion ensued about the proposed size for a Citation. Mr. Bain stated he would like to make sure the Committee did not make the size too small; generally, the Committee has opted to initiate a Citation on the large size as the fishery is developed and lower it if the size proves to be unduly large – a precautionary approach. Mr.

Neill responded that a “fair” number of 10-pound fish have been caught, but that was still a good-size fish. Mr. Bain asked the Committee to think about 11 or 12 pounds as a starting point.

Mr. Randolph asked Mr. Neill and Mr. Wray (public attendee) what percentage of fish they caught were ten pounds or larger. They responded that 1% - 3% was a good estimate. Mr. Neill added that only 3 fish larger than 16 pounds and 6 fish larger than 15 pounds were caught this year. Mr. Hall and Mr. Lucy stated that we are likely to see average fish size get smaller after the initial “burst” of big fish in this new fishery, since they are slow-growing, long-lived fish.

Mr. Neill asked Mr. Lucy if we should encourage this fishery given the biology of the species; Mr. Lucy responded that “the cat is already out of the bag” and what we do will only incrementally increase the fishery.

Mr. Randolph stated that considering the discussion so far, 10 pounds seems to be a good starting point for a Citation.

Mr. Paige stated there probably will be many new areas found and there will be bigger fish discovered. However in looking at many of our programs species the Citation minimum seems to be about 50% of the state record or maximum size and 10 pounds seems to fit these parameters.

Mr. Hall stated that he tended to agree with Mr. Bain about 90% of the time, but he felt the 10-pound size was right for this fish.

Mr. Neill stated that he knows we like to keep standards at even numbers, but he felt the state record minimum at 18 pounds could create a situation where a big fish was caught before the end of the year and registered for a new world record, then a smaller fish recognized for a state record. Mr. Bain asked if he wanted to move the effective date for inclusion in the state record program forward, perhaps to November 1. Mr. Neill stated that was not his intent, but that could solve the problem as long as the state record minimum was aligned to the world record size.

After additional discussion about the size issues, Mr. Seymour amended his original motion to add blueline tilefish to the state record program with a 17 lb., 8 oz. minimum and add to the Citation program with a 10-pound minimum. Mr. Randolph concurred with the amendment and continued his second. Passed 9-0.

Mr. Seymour followed with a motion to amend Tournament rules to specifically state that electric reels could not be used for any awards in the Citation or State Record programs. Mr. Paige seconded. Passed 9-0.

Mr. Bain moved to agenda item VIII – Citation appeals. Three appeals were filed to reinstate Citation applications which had been rejected. Mr. Bain presented the appeals and the Committee approved the first appeal (9-0) and rejected the 2 others (8-1 and 9-0, respectively).

Mr. Bain asked if there was any other business the Committee would like to consider. Mr. Neill stated that snowy grouper and golden tilefish fisheries should be examined for program inclusion. Mr. Bain stated the fisheries did not justify inclusion in the Citation program. Mr. Neill stated the snowy grouper record is likely to be broken; spikes of big fish occur and Virginia has some big fish now. He felt golden tilefish also would be pursued recreationally and a state

record should be provided for in our program. Mr. Hall stated state record recognition for each was appropriate, but not Citations. With the world all-tackle record snowy grouper coming from waters off Virginia, inclusion in the state record program was felt to be warranted.

Mr. Neill moved to include snowy grouper and golden tilefish in the state record program; seconded by Mrs. Snook; passed 9-0.

Mr. Neill moved the initial state record size for snowy grouper be established at 38 pounds; seconded by Mr. Randolph; passed 9-0.

Mr. Neill moved the initial state record size for golden tilefish be established at 40 pounds; seconded by Mrs. Snook; passed 9-0.

Mr. Neill moved that changes to the state record program carry an effective date of November 1, 2006; seconded by Mr. Hall; passed 9-0.

Mr. Bain asked if there were any additional matters the Committee wished to consider; none were brought to the floor.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.