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For Immediate Release

NOAA Sets \$15 Fee for the National Saltwater Angler Registry *Virginia fishermen are exempt through a new, free VMRC registry*

NOAA announced today that the annual fee for registering with the National Saltwater Angler Registry will be \$15.00 as of Jan. 1, 2011.

Virginia's saltwater anglers, however, will not have to pay the fee or sign up with the national registry. Virginia has been exempted through the efforts of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission.

In order to maintain that exemption, the VMRC will collect contact information when anglers buy an annual saltwater fishing license as of Jan. 1.

Anglers who do not need to buy a license under state law must register with the new Virginia Fisherman Identification Program **FOR FREE** and supply their contact information before they fish every year.

The Virginia Fisherman Identification Program will begin Jan. 1, 2011. Anglers may register annually by going to www.mrc.virginia.gov/FIP or by calling toll-free 800-723-2728. Registration will be quick, easy, and without charge.

The intent is to create a Virginia-wide "phone book" of saltwater anglers, which will be given to NOAA in order to improve fishing effort surveys and to exempt Virginia anglers from having to sign up directly with the National Saltwater Angler Registry and pay the annual \$15 federal registration fee.

Anglers with a valid Virginia saltwater fishing license, or a Potomac River Fisheries Sport Fishing License, do not have to register with the state FIP. Their contact information will be collected when they buy a license. Anglers under the age of 16 also are exempt from registering.

Virginia anglers who must register each year with the Fisherman Identification Program: Those who fish legally without a license (such as on a boat licensed to cover all anglers; from a commercial pier or private property; who are age 65 and older) or who fish in tidal freshwater for anadromous species such as striped bass or other marine species. They will be issued an identification number to keep with them while fishing to prove they have registered.

In effect, as of Jan. 1, 2011, all Virginia adult saltwater anglers will need either a valid saltwater fishing license or to register with the Fisherman Identification Program every year.

Virginia is one of 22 of the nation's 24 coastal states that now have saltwater angler registries or licenses and have been exempted from the federal requirement because they are providing registry information to the National Saltwater Angler Registry.

The National Saltwater Angler Registry is an important tool that enables NOAA to better estimate the health of marine fisheries so that more effective regulations can be established to preserve recreational fishing for the anglers, fishing businesses, coastal communities and millions of Americans whose lives and livelihoods are connected to saltwater fishing. Congress created the registry, a national phone book of anglers, through the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act of 2006 to improve surveys of fishermen used to assess the health of fish stocks and the economic contributions of anglers.

The law authorized NOAA's Fisheries Service to charge a fee for the annual registration beginning in 2011.

The National Saltwater Angler Registry is part of a major initiative to improve how NOAA's Fisheries Service gathers, analyzes and reports recreational fishing data. The goal of the Marine Recreational Information Program, or MRIP, is to ensure that the data scientists, managers, stock assessors and others need to effectively conserve our nation's ocean resources is available, accessible, held to the most exacting scientific standards, and broadly trusted by our partners and stakeholders in the fishing community and others. For more information or to register, visit www.CountMyFish.noaa.gov or call toll-free (888) MRIP-411.

The Virginia Marine Resources Commission manages Virginia's saltwater fisheries, both recreational and commercial, and is based in Newport News, Va. The Fisherman Identification Program is authorized by state law, and annual registration of non-licensed saltwater anglers is required.