

VIRGINIA SALTWATER FISHING TOURNAMENT AGENDA/Draft Minutes FOR TOURNAMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

**2600 Washington Avenue; Fourth Floor, Commission Library
Newport News, VA
December 7, 2016
7:00 pm**

- I. Introductions/Announcements
- II. Approval of minutes from the 2015 annual meeting

Minutes from the 2015 annual meeting were approved as written.

- III. Public Comment Period

There were two non-committee members present but there were no public comments at this time. Staff did receive email suggestions from one individual and these were distributed to the Committee.

- IV. Review 2016 Program

The Committee was provided with graphs, by species, showing Citation number by year since 1958, or starting when the species was added to the eligible list. The trend in Citation numbers by species, allowed comparison of the 2016 season to prior years. Painfully obvious to the Committee members were number of Citations for several of the most popular inshore species, such as croaker, flounder, gray trout and spot were historically low. The graphs also revealed such low levels of trophy-sized fish had occurred in other times since the tournament began in 1958. Particularly with flounder and gray trout, several members indicated the low level of Citations for each species did not fully reflect their overall lack of numbers of each species. The minimum qualifying weight for flounder was lowered from 7 pounds to 6 pounds for 2016. This change produced only a minor increase in Citation numbers in 2016. Several members commented in the Bay “people just were not fishing.” This was having a negative impact for marinas and tackle shops as well as the charter boats. Exceptions to the inshore downward trend were noted specifically for cobia and trophy red drum. Another member pointed out 2016 produced exceptional trolling for Spanish mackerel along the Virginia Beach

oceanfront. The total number of Citations will likely finish below recent years but very similar to the total number in 2015. The decrease for 2015 and 2016 in the total number of Citations for each year could almost entirely be accounted for by the winter cold shock event in the Elizabeth River in February of 2015. Citation numbers for speckled trout were well over 1,000 in 2012 and 2013, and near 1500 in 2014, but dropped to fewer than 100 in 2015 and will likely finish in 2016 with fewer than 100. Bright spots for 2016 can be found in the offshore fishery, as 2016 was another big year for white and blue marlin and dolphin. Inshore, both puppy drum and speckled trout in the 8 to 12-inch range were abundant.

The Committee next discussed whether modifying some of the minimum qualifying standards was warranted. Several Committee members weighed in noting most of the current Citation minimums are set at “true trophy” levels. They felt trying to track varying abundance levels of fish by altering Citations lengths and weights was not a good idea. Additionally, the long term value in maintaining stable qualifying lengths and weights provided a better barometer of population structure. The Committee briefly discussed golden tilefish, added to the list of eligible species for a weight Citation in 2014, and its 30-pound qualifying weight but felt no changes were warranted. The Committee appeared ready to move forward with a motion.

Chris Snook made a motion to maintain the minimum qualifying weights and lengths at the 2016 level for 2017. The motion was quickly seconded and passed unanimously.

There were no suggestions or discussions regarding rule changes.

V. Update State Records from 2016

No State record applications were received in 2016.

VI. Citation/State Record Appeals

There were no Citation or State record appeals in 2016.

VII. Other Business

VII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 PM.