



**SOUTH CAROLINA
GOVERNOR'S CUP BILLFISHING SERIES (GCBS)
2026 Fishing Guidelines**

1. All fish must be caught in accordance with all South Carolina and federal laws, and under IGFA Rules with the exception of passing rod to qualify to earn GCBS points/awards. **In addition, every individual (age 16 and above) aboard the vessel must have a valid official S.C Saltwater Recreational Fishing License in their possession.** After a fish strikes, the rod may be passed to one angler one time as soon as possible. All anglers may have the rod passed one time to them. After the rod has been passed, only the angler is allowed to touch the rod/reel/mainline. Once the leader is brought within the grasp of the crew member or is wound to the rod tip, then the angler may have assistance to catch and release or boat the fish. Series points will accrue towards Series awards for these fish. Vessels may provide assistance to other vessels for boating fish. Violations of state or federal law will lead to the disqualification of any fish caught on any fishing day where the violation would apply. **Any day when the violation would apply will be counted as an eligible fishing day for the tournament(s) and the GCBS.**

2. Knowingly fishing on a Fish Aggregating Device (FAD - is defined by NOAA as a floating object(s) that is designed and strategically placed to attract pelagic fish) during a Series tournament is prohibited and will lead to disqualification. Burden of proof falls upon the protesting vessel, and clear and convincing evidence must be provided by the protesting vessel to the individual Tournament Rules Committee. Disqualification for fishing on a FAD shall be determined by the Tournament Rules Committee.

3. White marlin, sailfish, and spearfish are catch and release only. Tagging is optional and not required for points. The minimum size for Series points or awards consideration for landed blue marlin is 105 inches measured in a curved line along the body from the fork of the tail to the tip of the lower jaw (LJFL). **Federal regulation dictates: 635.21 (a) All Atlantic HMS fishing gears. (1) An Atlantic HMS harvested from its management unit that is not retained must be released in a manner that will ensure maximum probability of survival, but without removing the fish from the water. (2) If a billfish is caught by a hook and not retained, the fish must be released by cutting the line near the hook or by using a dehooking device, in either case without removing the fish from the water.**
Note: 105 inches exceeds the federally mandated minimum size limit. Should the federal size limit be increased, the minimum size for blue marlin eligible for weighing in GCBS Series tournaments will be increased automatically to exceed the new minimum size by two (2) inches if required.

4. A penalty of 600 points will be assessed against a boat for each blue marlin brought to the dock not meeting the minimum GCBS Series size requirements.

5. Boats guilty of wanton waste of fish taken in a GCBS event will be disqualified from earning points in that event.

6. All landed fish are to be iced or refrigerated until such time as the edible tissue can be processed and the carcass disposed of. Boats landing blue marlin will have a maximum of three hours to complete this task after the fish is released by Series staff or Tournament officials.

7. Scoring for eligible blue marlin weighed-in is based solely on those points officially awarded each boat by each tournament. Boats earn one point per pound and fraction of a pound for their single heaviest blue marlin weighed in at each tournament. No points are awarded for additional blue marlin weighed in at any one tournament.

8. Only blue marlin, white marlin, sailfish, and spearfish are eligible for billfish catch and release points. Tagging is optional and not required for points. Billfish boated for any reason will not qualify for release points. Scoring for billfish caught and released is as follows:

Blue Marlin 600 points

White Marlin/Spearfish/Sailfish 200 points

9. For a vessel to qualify any billfish for points, a billfish must be fought to the boat in accordance with the GCBS Fishing Guidelines. Every person aboard the vessel 18 years of age or older must sign an official GCBS Released/Tagged and Released Billfish Affidavit or Landed Billfish Affidavit swearing that all rules and regulations were observed in reference to the described fish. Failure of any person to sign the affidavit, for any reason, disqualifies all billfish on the affidavit.

White marlin, spearfish, and sailfish will qualify as caught and released when the following three conditions have been met: 1) the fish has been identified as a billfish, 2) the leader (which may be no longer than 30 ft) is grasped by the crew or wound to the rod tip, and 3) the fish is no longer attached to the rod. Official time of release is when the fish is no longer attached to the rod. The official time of release must be the time relayed to the designated tournament committee boat and recorded on the affidavit. Points will be awarded if the fish was caught in accordance with the GCBS Fishing Guidelines and all three of the above listed conditions are met. No photo/video documentation is required for white marlin, spearfish, or sailfish.

Blue marlin will qualify as caught and released when video documentation of the following is provided: 1) species identification, 2) the leader (which may be no longer than 30 ft) being grasped by the crew or wound to the rod tip, and 3) the fish no longer attached to the rod. Official time of release is when the fish is no longer attached to the rod. The official time of release must be the time relayed to the designated tournament committee boat and recorded on the affidavit. All video documentation must include an accurate date and time stamp. Photos with corresponding date and time stamp can supplement the video for species identification purposes only. Points will be awarded at the time of release if all three of the documentation requirements are met. If the fish was caught in accordance with the GCBS Fishing Guidelines but these documentation requirements are not met, the fish will be awarded 200 points.

Boats should attempt to remove the hook or cut the leader as close as possible to the hook.

10. Billfish may not be brought into the boat unless it is to be brought to the dock for weighing. A penalty of 600 points will be assessed against a boat for each billfish if it is determined that the fish was boated and subsequently released.

11. Any billfish gaffed or otherwise injured in an attempt to boat the fish will not qualify for catch and release points. Additionally, if the gaff crosses the vertical plane of the boat in an attempt to land a blue marlin yet it is unsuccessful, the boat will not qualify for catch and release points.

12. The following must be hand-delivered to tournament headquarters or emailed to Series staff (GovCup@dnr.sc.gov) by participating boats on the day the catch and release or landing occurs:

1) Billfish documentation

2) The completed official GCBS Released/Tagged and Released Billfish Affidavits

a. Exceptions may be granted under extenuating circumstances. In these instances, the forms must be completed and returned within 72 hours of the catch and release.

Boats fishing out of other marinas or ports must also hand-deliver to tournament headquarters or email to Series staff (GovCup@dnr.sc.gov) required licenses and permits.

13. Boats will be awarded 25 participation points for each Series tournament entered, up to a maximum of three events. A boat's points total will include participation points as indicated along with points for

landed or caught and released billfish from all tournaments fished. Points will count toward aggregate point totals for Outstanding Billfish Boat and Outstanding Billfish Conservationist. Points cannot be transferred from one boat to another, except when a boat(s) makes a written request for special permission and the request is approved by the GCBS Advisory Board of Directors.

14. Boats must fish a minimum of two Series tournaments to qualify for Outstanding Billfish Boat and Outstanding Billfish Conservationist. Vessels fishing only one tournament qualify for Outstanding Billfish, Blue Water Conservation, Youth Angler, Lady Angler, and Outstanding Dolphin/Wahoo/Tuna Series awards.

15. Boat points are awarded at the time of release or landing (boated). Ties between points are broken by the time of release/landing. The date of the release/landing is based on the boat's fishing day (day 1 or 2) as opposed to the tournament fishing day (day 1-2-3).

16. Tournament awards will be presented for the heaviest tuna (eligible species include yellowfin, blackfin, bluefin, and bigeye tuna), dolphin, and wahoo caught by boats participating in the Series and for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place Youth Anglers (under sixteen years of age on April 1 of current tournament year) and Outstanding Lady Anglers (female over sixteen years of age on April 1 of current tournament year). The tournament awards for Youth and Lady Anglers will be awarded for the heaviest tuna, dolphin or wahoo if no Youth or Lady Angler has landed or caught and released a legal billfish. Billfish caught by Youth or Lady Anglers will earn regular Series points for the species.

17. A Blue Water Conservation award will be presented to the boat accumulating the most points tagging dolphin (50 points), eligible tuna (100 points) and/or wahoo (150 points). All fish must be caught on legal Series tournament fishing days and tagged using official tags supplied by the Marine Resources Division's Marine Gamefish Tagging Program. Completed tagging reports will serve as official entry forms and must be submitted to Series staff working the tournament or the weighmaster on the same day the fish was tagged. A minimum of 24 fish must be tagged in order to qualify for this award.

18. Creel limits for dolphin are 10 per angler per day with a limit of 54 per boat per day, with a minimum legal-size limit of 20 inches fork length. Creel limits for yellowfin tuna are 3 per angler per day with a minimum legal size of 27 inches curved body fork length; see current federal size and creel limits for other tuna species. Creel limit for wahoo is 2 per person per day.

Note: Size or creel limits will automatically be changed in S.C. GCBS tournaments to reflect changes in federal or state laws.

19. All awards are presented to the boat. Invitations to the annual GCBS Awards Reception are limited to winning boat crews and to boat owners whose boats fish two or more yearly Series events.

20. It is the intent of the S.C. GCBS to encourage the release of healthy billfish, therefore the use of 130 lb. class line is allowed.

21. Series participants, at the completion of a tournament fishing day, are subject to a biological creel survey by SCDNR staff and/or an interview by SCDNR Law Enforcement.

22. A boat owner may request an official ruling from the S.C. GCBS Series within 48 hours of lines out on the last day of the tournament. The request for a ruling must be submitted in writing to the S.C. GCBS Advisory Board chair to GovCupBoard@dnr.sc.gov. The ruling committee will consist of the Advisory Board chair, Advisory Board vice chair, Tournament Committee chair, two Advisory Board members, and two Tournament Committee members. The ruling committee shall rule on the request within 30 days. All decisions of the ruling committee are final. Members of the ruling committee will recuse themselves from the decision if there is a conflict of interest. All rulings will focus solely on compliance with S.C. GCBS Series rules, not individual tournament rules.