



# Tag & Release

A newsletter following the South Carolina Governor's Cup Billfishing Series



April 2020  
Vol. 25 No. 2

*Supporting the conservation of billfish, ocean resources, billfish tournaments and coastal tourism for over 30 years...*

Since 1989, the Cup has promoted the catch and release of billfish, resulting in a shift from a 90% landing rate to a 99% release rate in the billfishing industry in the Palmetto State!

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### Series Reflections

As I sit here in my office for possibly only the fourth time in a month, I think back to the way life used to be before this novel virus outbreak, and wonder whether it will ever be the same. To put this in perspective, the first quarter of the year found me at a large international 5-day Mariculture and Fisheries meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii in early February. There were over 2,500 attendees and I had the opportunity to meet with colleagues I had not seen in over a decade; notably absent were associates from China. At this meeting, for the first time, I began to see speakers attending remotely and using various web applications to give their papers and answer questions. This was quickly followed by a 3-day Regional Shellfish Mariculture meeting in Wilmington, NC attended by over 600. I was the only attendee from SCDNR, as others had started to become nervous about travel. In early March, I attended the 2-day, SC Chapter of the American Fisheries Society meeting at Santee State Park that was the scene of rampant use of hand sanitizer. At this point, a reasonable person in the "elderly," preexisting condition demographic might have said enough is enough, but I had a long-scheduled opportunity to finally go billfishing in Costa Rica, and I was not going to cancel! As most of you know by now, I have never been far

## 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual SC Governor's Cup Billfishing Series 2020 Tournament Schedule

**May 20 - 23** 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Georgetown Blue Marlin Tournament  
Contact: Ed Keelin  
P.O. Box 1704  
Georgetown SC 29442  
(843) 546-1776 Fax (843) 546-7832  
ed@georgetownlandingmarina.com

**June 17 - 20** Carolina Billfish Classic  
Contact: Deidre Menefee  
20 Patriots Point Road  
Mt. Pleasant, SC 29464  
(843) 345-0369  
dm@fishcbc.com

**July 15 - 18** Edisto Invitational Billfish Tournament  
Contact: Brian Bell  
3702 Docksite Road  
Edisto Beach, SC 29438  
(843) 631-5055 Fax (843) 631-5065  
bkbell2009@gmail.com

**Jul 29 - Aug. 1** Bohicket Marina Invitational Billfish Tournament  
Contact: Beau Anderson  
1880 Andell Bluff Blvd.  
Johns Island, SC 29455  
(843) 768-1280  
marinamanager@bohicket.com

**\*\*The Megadock will be under construction during the summer of 2020 and unable to host a tournament yet will return in 2021.\*\***

### For more information, contact:

Amy Dukes, SC Governor's Cup Tournament Coordinator  
[DukesA@dnr.sc.gov](mailto:DukesA@dnr.sc.gov) · [govcup.dnr.sc.gov](http://govcup.dnr.sc.gov) · (843) 953-9365  
PO Box 12559 · Charleston, SC 29422



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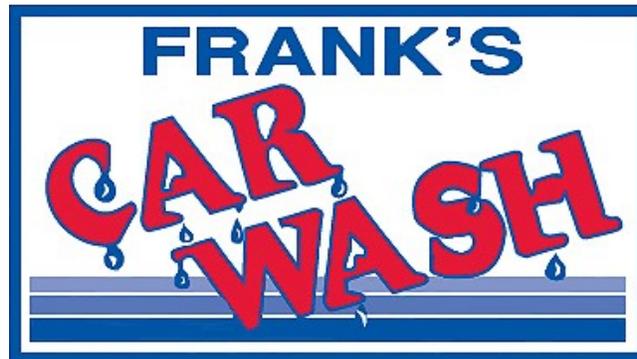
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offshore for anything other than a one-day gambling/booze cruise that probably went out just far enough to get into federal waters. I can not describe what a wonderful time I had fishing with a great captain and crew on a great boat and to finally visualize and understand what it is you guys do. The sight of free jumping sailfish and schools of yellowfin tuna breaking the surface while being pursued at the surface by hundreds of dolphin is forever etched in my mind. As is the choreography between the captain and crew as they clear and deploy lines and put the angler in position to successfully release these beautiful animals. Yes, I even caught a few, while making every rookie mistake in the book. I am glad we were fun fishing, as opposed to tournament fishing, as I am sure everyone's demeanor would have been more intense. In two days of fishing, we released 32 sails and these girls were WAY bigger than the ones I've seen in tournament photos from here! But alas, the real world began to close in as we learned that the final leg of the Los Sueños Series was being canceled, and later that many countries were restricting inbound international flights. My wife became more concerned with calls from home each day, but we were able to get back to US soil and pass through a virtually deserted Atlanta Airport. I think what surprised me most on my return to the office on March 16<sup>th</sup> was that people were genuinely afraid to be around me. After all, with all the travel and large

international groups of people I had been around in the previous 1 1/2 months, in their minds, I was probably the most likely person in the state to have been exposed to this virus. In the month since, we as an Agency have been telecommuting for the most part, except for essential tasks. I have personally learned to use those web applications I first witnessed in Hawaii and I am getting more tech-savvy each day. The tournament schedule has been upended, with Bohicket being postponed until July 29- August 1. Earlier this week, the Advisory Board approved an alternate date for Georgetown of August 12-15, should that become necessary. I am hopeful that Georgetown will be able to go on as originally scheduled, but no matter what, things will be different, including no more in-person interviews or handshakes, etc. This is just the beginning of things that will likely need some tweaking to insure everyone's safety, but rest assured

we will not have the tournament in May if we do not think it can be done safely. I think my colleague Cameron Rhodes summed it up best in a recent article in *Coastal Angler Magazine*: "It's certainly an unprecedented time in our history. That being said, the sportfishing community remains resilient, hopeful, tireless and unified. We continue to see that every day on social media, in magazines, and via phone calls. Folks are encouraged to postpone fishing trips rather than cancel them, and people everywhere are being urged to support local business during these difficult times." The staff of the SC Governor's Cup Billfishing Series remains optimistic and is honored to be part of such a caring community." Until we meet again, stay safe!

~Wally Jenkins



## THE SC MEMORIAL REEF

We're excited to announce that we have our sights set on a new project to sink a fourth structure in the SC Memorial Reef MPA! On the horizon lies an opportunity that is as massive as its opportunity to promote habitat growth for deep water species and fishing opportunity for pelagics. The Highway 21 bridge that connects Hilton Head with the mainland is set to be demolished, and staff and friends have been hard at work to sequester as much of the structure as possible to add to the reef site. Many details and negotiations are still at play, but we wanted to get you ready and eager for another fundraising effort coming your way soon!

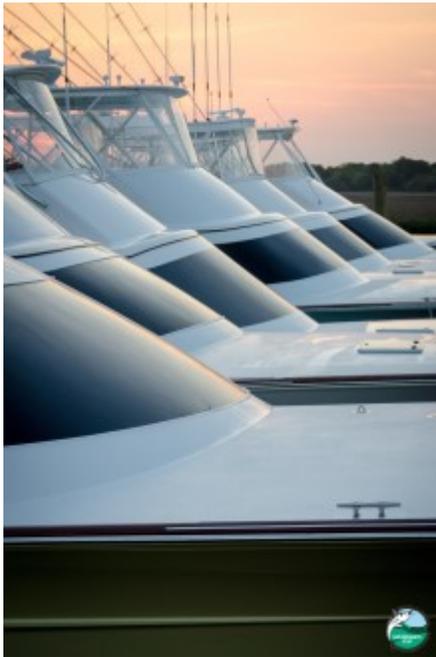
### Donate now!

- \* Make checks payable to: Harry Hampton Fund - The SC Memorial Reef, C/O Amy Dukes, PO Box 12559, Charleston, SC 29422
- \* Donate Online: A tax-deductible receipt will be provided for both online sources.
  - <https://scmemorialreef.com/>
  - <http://www.hamptonwildlifefund.org/> - write "SC Memorial Reef" in the instructions box to ensure it's accredited to the appropriate project.



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# 2020 FISHING GUIDELINES

New edits in bold

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 S.C. Governor's Cup 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 all fish caught on that fishing day, and the day will be counted as an eligible fish day for the tournament.

**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 S.C. Governor's Cup 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 South Carolina Governor's Cup Series size requirements.

5. Boats guilty of wanton waste of fish taken in a Series 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 in good condition is as follows:

Blue Marlin	600 points
White Marlin/Spearfish	300 points
Sailfish	200 points

9. To qualify for catch and release points, a billfish must be fought to the boat according to program guidelines. A billfish is considered caught and points will be awarded when all of the following has occurred: 1) the leader is grasped by the crew or is wound to the rod tip (a leader may be no longer than 30 ft.); 2) the billfish is positively identified to species through digital photography/videography (if species cannot be determined yet it is identified as a billfish, 200 points will be awarded); and 3) the fish is released in a healthy condition and the fish is no longer attached to the boat/line. Boats should attempt to remove the hook or to sever 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, harpooned 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. For a vessel to qualify any billfish for points, every person aboard the vessel 18 years of age or older

must sign an official Governor's Cup 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 that fish. In addition, all released billfish must be clearly digitally photographed or videoed (preferable image would include a visible dorsal fin) at time of release by each vessel using a digital/video camera provided by the vessel. The image must include a date and time stamp that corresponds to the date and time of release recorded by the designated tournament committee boats. Photos/videos must be provided on a removable storage device and will be used to confirm species identification and release information and will be used to resolve potential conflicts or formal protests.

13. Affidavits must be completed the day the catch and release or landing occurs, except when a medical emergency involving the boat's crew prohibits completion of the form or when a mechanically disabled boat cannot return within the prescribed weigh-in period. In these instances, the forms must be completed and returned within ten (10) days of the catch and release. If applicable by the individual tournaments, boats fishing out of other marinas or ports must fax or hand-deliver the completed official Governor's Cup Released/Tagged and Released Billfish Affidavit and email digital images to tournament headquarters or Series staff ([DukesA@dnr.sc.gov](mailto:DukesA@dnr.sc.gov)) prior to the close of the weighing scales on the day of catch with the exception as noted above.

14. 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 Advisory Board of Directors.

15. 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.

16. 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).

17. 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.

18. 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.

19. Creel limits for dolphin are 10 per angler per day with a limit of 60 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. Governor's Cup Billfishing Series tournaments to reflect changes in federal or state laws.

20. All awards are presented to the boat. Invitations to the annual Governor's Cup Awards Reception are limited to winning boat crews and to boat owners whose boats fish two or more yearly Series events.

21. It is the intent of the S.C. Governor's Cup to encourage the release of healthy billfish, therefore the use of 130 lb. class line is allowed.

22. 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.

23. A boat owner may request an official ruling from the S.C. Governor's Cup Series. The request for a ruling must be submitted in writing to a member of the Tournament Committee. The Tournament Committee shall rule on the request within seven (7) days. Any ruling of the Tournament Committee may be appealed by writing to the Advisory Board of Directors within forty-eight (48) hours, excluding weekends and holidays. The Board shall render results of an appeal, in writing, to the appellant within thirty (30) days. All decisions of the Board are final. Voting individuals representing either the Tournament Committee or the Advisory Board of Directors will recuse themselves from the decision if there is a conflict of interest. All rulings will focus solely on compliance with S.C. Governor's Cup Series rules, not individual tournament rules.

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The S.C. Department of Natural Resources' Law Enforcement Division reminds the public of Coast Watch, which was developed to better help citizens report violations of saltwater recreational and commercial fishing laws, as well as marine environmental laws. **The Coast Watch hotline number (1-800-922-5431) is toll-free and available 24 hours a day.**

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, gender, religion or age. Direct all inquiries to the Office of Human Resources, PO Box 167, Columbia, South Carolina, 29202.