



A request for renewal of funding of the Virginia Marine Sportfish Collection Project (Year 6).

**Need:**

The Virginia Marine Resources Commission's Biological Sampling Program (also known as the Stock Assessment Program) has been collecting length, weight, sex, and age information from thirteen primary species since 1998. Since 1998, additional species of interest have been added or removed. Fish are processed either by VMRC staff or the Age and Growth lab at Old Dominion University, Center for Quantitative Fisheries Ecology.

In the past, the majority of all biological samples came from the commercial fishing industry, with very few samples from the recreational fishing community. However, not every species of interest is readily available for sampling from commercial harvesters, either due to low quantities or high prices. Since 2007, recreational anglers have assisted VMRC in collecting samples of species of interest through the Marine Sportfish Collection Project. In fact, for recreationally dominated fisheries such as tautog, VMRC is dependent on recreational sampling donations to fulfill annual biological sampling mandates.

**Objective:**

To increase the number of length, sex, and age samples collected for the following recreationally important species. This list is dynamic and can change as sampling needs are identified, or sampling goals met, during the year.

Current 2012 Listing

Cobia	Black Drum
Sheepshead	Tautog
Spanish Mackerel	Blueline Tilefish
Speckled Trout	Golden Tilefish
Spadefish (greater than 22 inches)	Warsaw Grouper
Bluefish (greater than 16 pounds or 36 inches)	Snowy Grouper
Red Drum	Wreckfish

**Estimated Benefits:**

Marine fish populations are exploited by commercial and recreational fishermen and are subject to significant pressure through habitat degradation. Fisheries scientists conduct stock assessments to determine the health of a fishery and establish recommendations for future harvest levels. At the foundation of these stock assessments are accurate data on catch and effort and descriptive data on population demographics. Accurate and precise age, sex, and length composition data, in concert with age-specific vital rates such as

fecundity and selectivity, allow fisheries scientists to choose from a suite of assessment models to predict appropriate harvests.

The information collected also is beneficial to fisheries managers. For example, in 2009, biological data collected through the Marine Sportfish Collection Project was a key component in promoting Virginia's need for separate management opportunities for the tilefish and grouper fisheries offshore. In 2012, Virginia's biological data on cobia, to include all samples collected through the collection project, were recognized as one of the best sources of data available for 2012 coastwide stock assessment of the resource.

### Approach:

In cooperation with local fishing facilities, chest freezers are provided to select locations. Each freezer is marked with an identifying sign and a list of target species. A supply of durable plastic bags, information cards and pens will be provided in each freezer. Cooperating fishermen are able to put a freshly filleted frame of the fish, with head and tail intact in a plastic bag, along with the completed information card, and place the bag in the freezer. Bags are collected by VMRC staff and processed for biological information. An incentive program for anglers is included in the project. Once a month, fishermen participating in the program will earn a promotional shirt or hat (angler's choice).



Additional samples are obtained directly from select regional fishing tournaments which VMRC staff provides technical support.



Over 1,000 angler donations had been received since the project's inception in July, 2007. Data tables will be generated by VMRC's Biological Sampling Program by May 2012 and presented to the RFAB that detail the species, number, and minimum and maximum size of the donations to date through 2011, and the specific 2011 donations from each of the project donation sites. In addition, as data becomes available, it will be posted on the VMRC website at: [http://mrc.virginia.gov/rec\\_assessment/index.shtm](http://mrc.virginia.gov/rec_assessment/index.shtm) and participating anglers will receive by mail updated information on the project's donated fish, to date.

### **Location History:**

The project initially began on July 5, 2007, with collection freezers set-up in cooperation with three bait and tackle shops: Wallace's Bait and Tackle (Hampton), Long Bay Pointe Marina (Virginia Beach) and Chris' Bait and Tackle (Capeville). These three locations were ideal for the initial start-up of this project, as they were locations that had high angler traffic; and an onsite cleaning station and weight station. During 2008 Bell Isle Marina (Hampton), Wachapreague Marina, and Morningstar Marina (Gwynn's Island) were added as project donation sites. In addition, Chris' Bait and Tackle added a second donation freezer to their site during May 2008 to meet public participation demands. In 2008, Morningstar Marina ceased to be a project donation site, but staff is working to locate another Middle Peninsula or Northern Neck donation site for the project. The

project initially proposed five locations within the first year, a goal that was met by May 2008 the end of funding for the first year. However, due to the budget constraints during 2009 and the delay in determining future funding availabilities from the Virginia Recreational Fishing Development Fund, the project was downsized to ensure sustainability through the summer of 2009. The downsizing included reducing the number of freezer collection locations to three (Wallace’s Bait and Tackle, Long Bay Pointe Marina and Chris’ Bait and Tackle) temporarily. Cost cutting measures allowed for a fourth site to be added in May 2009, Buckroe Fishing Pier. A fifth freezer location was added during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2009 at the Virginia Beach Fishing Center. In 2010, the project expanded to seven locations. Freezers were added at Rudee Inlet Station Marina in Virginia Beach and Carrollton Hunting and Fishing Supply in Carrollton. Also, upon the closing of Wallace’s Bait and Tackle in September 2010, the collection freezer was moved nearby to Back River Outfitter’s (formerly Vanesse’s Bait and Tackle).

For 2011, a new collection location was established at Little Creek Marina in Norfolk and Dare Marina in York County. However, Dare Marina voluntarily dropped out of the program in late 2011 due to an inadequate power supply for the freezer at the cleaning station. Also, due to low donation amounts, the freezers at Buckroe Pier and Carrollton Hunting and Fishing Supply were removed from the project sites. The freezer from Carrollton was able to be recycled back into the program for re-use. Staff continues to look for an additional viable collection project site in the Poquoson/York County region, and a new site in the Middle Peninsula or Northern Neck region.

**Length of Time:**

Collection from recreational fishery, with promotional incentives, will continue each year. The annual budget will be adjusted each year to represent projected funding needs. Currently, we are not projecting the need for additional replacement freezers in 2012.

**Estimated Cost (Year 6):**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Total Cost</b>
Project supplies (bags, information sheets, pencils, cleaning materials)	\$1,500.00
Promotional items (hats, shirts, signs)	\$5,000.00
Promotional item mailings (envelopes and postage)	\$2,500.00
Sample processing and transport equipment (replacement saws and blades, cold boxes, hand carts).	\$1,000.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$10,000.00</b>