



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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NEW JERSEY GOVERNOR SIGNS HISTORIC FREE ANGLER REGISTRY LAW RFA-NJ Says Coastal Anglers Will Fish Free in the Garden State in 2011

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie signed New Jersey's free saltwater registry bill into law today, which will allow coastal anglers to register their name and phone number with the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) at no cost in 2011. By federal law, saltwater anglers are required to register their name and phone number with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on an annual basis in order to fish in coastal waters. In November, NMFS announced that the fee for registering with the National Saltwater Angler Registry will be \$15 as of January 1, a change affecting many anglers and spear fishermen in Hawaii, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"From a federal perspective, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie has just put forth a historic piece of legislation that helps memorialize the public's right to free and open access to our nation's public resources," said Jim Donofrio, Executive Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA). "While there's been a lot of public confusion over the past few months in the state regarding this legislation, and we're grateful that Governor Christie has taken the time to analyze the facts, cutting through the red tape and bureaucracy surrounding the need for a saltwater registry."

"A big thanks to Senators Jeff Van Drew and Jennifer Beck, as well as Speaker Sheila Oliver and Chairman Nelson Albano for working across party lines to make this happen for New Jersey's saltwater anglers," said Donofrio, while adding "it took legislative support to get this law passed, not to mention plenty of grassroots political action of RFA members in the state of New Jersey, the very essence of the I Fish, I Vote motto used by RFA members for nearly 15 years."

Currently, 22 of the nation's 24 coastal states are exempted from the federal registration requirements because of existing state programs which provide the necessary angler data to the National Saltwater Angler Registry. The new saltwater angler registry law now requires DEP to establish a free angler registry program for the state of New Jersey, much the same as what the state of Delaware has done through their Fisherman Identification Number (www.delaware-fin.com) Donofrio said.

"We need to enhance tourism, and what better way to do it than free fishing?" said Sen. Van Drew, primary sponsor of S1122 and a driving force in getting the free registry legislation signed into law in New Jersey. "It's symbolic. New Jersey could be a real leader on this," Van Drew recently told Shore News Today. "The bureaucrats are pushing for a tax and we're saying, 'C'mon, this one time let's let the fishermen breathe.' We would gain more revenue back for the state by doing something bold to promote fishing. Think of all the bait and tackle, fishing equipment, restaurant dinners and everything else fishermen buy. A fee would damper the environment and that's not good," the senator added.

Donofrio said getting the legislation passed in New Jersey has been a four-year uphill climb, but he said the legislators from Cape May County who really deserve much of the credit for fighting to protect the rights of all of New Jersey's coastal districts. "The coalition of Senator Van Drew and Assemblyman Albano along with Assemblyman Jeff Milam heard their constituents and especially from the coastal business community in support of their legislation, and they weren't about to get pushed off their mission to get this law signed," said Donofrio.

"With today's signing, we expect to work closely with the Governor and the federal fisheries service to get a temporary exemption in place until the DEP is able to roll out the registry program this season, but today is definitely a great day to be an RFA member."

The New Jersey chapter of the RFA (RFA-NJ) has been active in supporting saltwater angler registry legislation ever since federal law was changed in 2007 to call for a virtual phonebook of saltwater anglers nationwide. "It's a fairly simple and straightforward law, which is why it's had such overwhelming support throughout our coastal fishing community," said Capt. Adam Nowalsky, chairman of the RFA-NJ.

"The majority of charter and party boat captains throughout New Jersey, along with our tackle shops and coastal anglers from here in the state on out to Pennsylvania have been vocal in supporting this legislation along the way, and our chapter volunteers are thrilled that the Governor has recognized that unified voice," he said.

"It's consistent with what the governor has said about not raising taxes and fees," Donofrio said. "We've been working with the governor's office to identify how to make this happen, and we're looking forward to working more closely with his administration in the coming days to help ensure that it happens with the coastal community's input and support."

For details about the national saltwater registry, visit www.countmyfish.noaa.gov.

The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA's Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation's saltwater fisheries. For information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.