



# JOINT PRESS RELEASE

**Recreational Fishing Alliance &  
New York Sportfishing Federation**  
107-14 Queens Blvd. #17, Forest Hills, NY 11375



For Immediate Release  
Contact: Jim Hutchinson, Jr.

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888 564-6732

## **NY SALTWATER ANGLERS DO NOT NEED A LICENSE TO FISH! Question Answered As New Budget Immediately Repeals Saltwater Fishing Fee**

*April 4, 2011* - New York's saltwater anglers are officially off the hook with regard to paying a fee to fish!

Governor Andrew Cuomo's new \$132.5 billion budget passed before the April 1 deadline immediately repeals the saltwater fishing license and replaces it with a free registry coordinated through the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Swapping out a fee-based saltwater fishing license with a free registry should allow New York to retain its federal registry exemption, thereby allowing state anglers to avoid having to pay a \$15 federal fee to fish. As part of the Environmental Conservation budget bill, the registry will be no cost to anglers for at least the next two years.

According to state Senator Lee Zeldin (*R-Shirley*), an agreement secured through leaders from the senate, assembly and governor's office last week helped pave the way for the repeal, which includes a full refund of the lifetime license fee (\$150), no reduction to the balance of the Conservation Fund and an additional \$1.9 million in General Fund support for Marine Bureau operations. Also effective immediately, party and charter boat captains no longer have to buy a \$400 annual saltwater license to cover their passengers.

Sen. Zeldin, who helped spearhead senate efforts to repeal the saltwater user fee, also said the DEC's Marine Bureau will not be responsible for paying for jobs for which it assumed responsibility in 2009, and added that full compliance with the federal saltwater fishing registry requirements means New Yorkers will not have to purchase any separate registrations.

"This is a piece of legislation that is very important to the needs of my district," Zeldin told NewsLI.com. "I would like to thank not only my senate and assembly colleagues who spent hours listening to me and working with me, but I would also like to thank the thousands of fishermen, including the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA), who called, wrote, faxed and signed our petition," stated Senator Zeldin.

In February, Senator Zeldin introduced a bill (S3638) to repeal the saltwater fishing license fee, and has been working the halls of the Capitol ever since to bring a broad coalition together to fight for its repeal. The budget agreement finalized by Governor Cuomo's approved budget now sets the Conservation Fund balance at \$22.2 million as of today, with a projected balance totaling more than \$38 million in the fund as of April 1, 2012.

Similar to the free registry program being developed in New Jersey, the New York registration will also collect names and phone numbers of New York state marine anglers to fulfill the federal requirements for data collection. According Jim Hutchinson, Jr., RFA managing director and president of the New York Sportfishing Federation, the state DEC has a couple of mechanisms already in place which can satisfy the federal registration requirements.

"DEC's Automated Licensing System (DECALS) is the backbone of the license program and can handle the registry requirements at a cost of about \$2.14 per transaction, while the Harvest Information Program (HIP) used for identical waterfowl survey programs can adequately accomplish this same task for just \$1 per user," Hutchinson said citing DEC sources. "The federal registration requirements should not have been used for a separate funding mechanism for the bureaucracy, and we're thankful that legislators worked across the aisle in order to repeal this user fee."

Assemblyman Fred Thiele (*I- Sag Harbor*), primary sponsor of the Assembly version of the license repeal bill, called the saltwater fishing "ill-conceived" from the start. "Not only was it a tax on one of the fundamental rights that Long Island residents have had since colonial times, but it was a burden to the recreational fishing industry at a time when the recession was taking its toll on the local economy," Assemblyman Thiele said. "This action will

send a message that the state recognizes that the right to fish should be free and that recreational fishing is a critical part of the Long Island economy,” he added.

While many public sector representatives opposed the repeal efforts, the vast majority of private sector anglers and business owners argued against the license fee since first being implemented back in 2009. While the fee was relatively low when compared to states like California which charges fees of \$40 to \$135 a year for anglers to access marine waters, representatives of the New York recreational sector argued that new access fees on Long Islander were simply an open door for future problems.

“It’s not just \$10, it’s another \$10 and that’s what’s important to remember,” said John Mantione, spokesman for the New York Fishing Tackle Trades Association (NYFTTA). Mantione said additional fees have helped contribute to overall reduction in angler effort, which is the worst thing for business owners in a recession as it leads to lost sales in the business community, which in turn means less tax revenue for the state. “The repeal of the saltwater tax will help recover our limited Long Island economy,” he added.

According to NYFTTA, an email update from the Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources to state license retailers said marine licenses were no longer necessary as of Thursday. “Customers must register through DECALS however and we will be adding a registry item to the catalog. It will take some time before the registry is available via DECALS. There will be no charge for the registry,” the email reported, adding that refunds will be started soon for customers who purchased a Lifetime Marine Recreational Fishing License. Meanwhile, Lifetime Combo License holders will have their Lifetime Combo License exchanged for a Lifetime Fishing License.

“I cannot think of a better way to start the new fishing season off than with this great news,” Zeldin said, adding “it’s a bright, sunny day for saltwater fishermen.”

Hutchinson said the RFA wished to officially thank those legislators who helped move the license repeal efforts, including co-sponsors of the Senate version of the repeal bill senators Greg Ball (*R-Patterson*), Kemp Hannon (*R-Westbury*), Owen Johnson (*R-Babylon*), Bill Larkin (*R-Cornwall-on-Hudson*), Ken LaValle (*R-Port Jefferson*), Tom Libous (*R-Binghamton*), Carl Marcellino (*R-Syosset*) and Jack Martins (*R-Mineola*). Assembly co-sponsors include James D. Conte (*R-Huntington Station*), Michael J. Fitzpatrick (*R-St. James*), Al Graf (*R-Holbrook*), Dan Losquadro (*R-Shoreham*), Tom McKeivitt (*R-East Meadow*), Michael Montesano (*R-Glen Head*), Dean Murray (*R-East Patchogue*), Andrew P. Raia (*R-East Northport*), Joseph S. Saladino (*R-Massapequa*), Michelle Schimel (*D-Great Neck*), and Harvey Weisenberg (*D-Long Beach*).

“We’re particularly grateful to Environmental Conservation Committee Chairs Assemblyman Bob Sweeney (*D-Lindenhurst*) and Senator Mark Grisanti (*R-Buffalo*) for their efforts to help support and protect our coastal resources, while also safeguarding the access rights our coastal constituents,” Hutchinson said, adding “not to mention those dedicated RFA-NY and New York Sportfishing Federation members who participated in the lobbying efforts to push this repeal through, it was most certainly a group effort.”

“It helps of course to have a saltwater angler living in the governor’s mansion, and I think all our anglers owe Governor Cuomo a debt of gratitude for facing these tough budget decisions with an eye on our saltwater fishing community,” he said.

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*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 more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit [www.joinrfa.org](http://www.joinrfa.org).*

*Established in 1981, the New York Sportfishing Federation is a recognized non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the marine habitat, maintaining the bio-diversity of our marine resources through sound management practices, and promoting sportfishing opportunities throughout the New York marine district. Visit [www.nysf.org](http://www.nysf.org).*