



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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NEW YORK'S SALTWATER LICENSE TO BE REPEALED User Fee Will Be Gone in 180 Days - Replaced By Free Registry

New York's saltwater fishing license is being repealed!

According to the Associated Press, New York lawmakers and the Cuomo administration have just reached an agreement to end the state's \$10 annual saltwater fishing license and replace it with a free registry for the state's coastal waters. Legislators announcing the change yesterday say it will cover two years.

The Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) received a "high priority" email sent through DEC channels yesterday afternoon regarding the license repeal, noting that budget discussions between Governor Cuomo and the New York state legislature helped facilitate the repeal effort, which is said will take place in the next 180 days.

Last Tuesday, March 15th, a Senate Budget Resolution calling for the repeal of the MTA Payroll Tax for public and private schools, as well as full repeal of the saltwater fishing license was passed in the New York Senate. "I made clear from the beginning of the Budget process that I would not support any new taxes or fees," Sen. Lee Zeldin (R-Shirley) said last week.

Sen. Zeldin, a Long Island saltwater angler, last month introduced legislation in the New York Senate (S3638) which would amend the environmental conservation law in relation to establishing a registration system for saltwater recreational fishing, essentially repealing that part which mandates that a fee to fish be levied on saltwater anglers. Under the Senate Budget Resolution passed last week, the saltwater fishing license and fee would end with the expiration of the current 2011 license.

On Friday, March 18th, a fax campaign was initiated by the RFA and the New York Sportfishing Federation to help garner support from Assemblyman Robert Sweeney (D-Lindenhurst) as chairman of the New York Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee. According to the Associated Press, Stephen Liss, counsel to Assemblyman Sweeney, said a three-way deal was worked out this past Tuesday night which will be included in the upcoming budget.

The Associated Press reports that an administration official confirmed the agreement, which still must be ratified in the State Budget, which is expected to be approved by April 1.

Assemblyman Fred W. Thiele, Jr. (I-Sag Harbor), who vehemently opposed the license requirement two years ago, had sponsored legislation ever since to repeal the requirement, including legislation in the current session with Sen. Zeldin (A6169). Thiele also supported litigation by the Southampton and East Hampton Trustees with five other Long Island Towns which successfully obtained an injunction against the law in the seven Long Island towns. In a release issued yesterday, Thiele said New York's license law will be transformed into a registration requirement to meet federal law, and noted that this week's agreement also provides that the registration will be guaranteed to be free for the next two years. In addition, those who purchased lifetime licenses will be granted a refund minus the fee for the past year.

"The idea of a saltwater fishing license was ill-conceived from the outset. 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. 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," Thiele said.

The RFA said while some state workers may view the bipartisan decision in Albany as a dark day for the public sector, the decision is good news for private sector constituents concerned about the rising cost of bureaucracy.

“With all due respect to our friends in the public sector, the private sector is fed up with this same old ‘pay me now, bill me later’ mentality permeating state government,” said RFA managing director Jim Hutchinson. “New York’s saltwater fishing license was an inferior product from the start, and as consumers, constituents and taxpayers, our state’s sportfishermen asked that it be replaced,” Hutchinson.

“We’re grateful to all those New York legislators who showed what true bipartisan leadership is all about,” Hutchinson said, crediting Governor Cuomo, Sen. Zeldin, Assemblyman Sweeney and Assemblyman Thiele for working together to secure an agreement on behalf of the New York marine district.

“Those who would impose a user fee on public access are quick to make claims of the privilege of fishing and paying for said privilege, but that’s not the way we see things at the RFA,” Hutchinson said. “The vast majority of sportsmen in New York’s marine district do not believe that fishing is only a privilege, but instead believe strongly in their right to access this public resource. The recent legal challenge on the East End helped reconfirm that long-held belief, and we have nothing but praise for those legislators for helped honor that continued coastal tradition, from the Governor’s office on out to our Long Island Assembly and Senate leaders, democrats, republicans and independents alike,” he said.

RFA and the New York Sportfishing Federation also wish to thank all those members and friends who participated in this past weekend’s fax campaign to spread the word about the repeal efforts, which they believe made a significant impact in getting the license repeal through.

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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.