



## COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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### **Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament**

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### **New State Record Bluefin Tuna Tops 700 pounds**

A 708-pound bluefin tuna, caught on February 16, 2020 by Jake Hiles, of Virginia Beach, has been certified as the new Virginia State Record by the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament's Director Lewis Gillingham. Hiles catch surpasses the existing state record bluefin tuna of 606 pounds, caught in April of 2007, by his friend Chase Robinson of Virginia Beach. Hiles was a crew member on that trip.

The record-setting catch was made nearly 80 miles SSE of Rudee Inlet, at a location affectionately nick-named the "Tuna Hole." Captain Hiles, a well-known charter captain and owner of the vessel "Toro" and fishing buddy Jeff Landis, left Rudee Inlet around noon and it was late afternoon by the time the pair reached the fishing grounds. Trolling gear was deployed and as they motored through a warm-water eddy, they hooked up to what appeared to be a really big bluefin. After a spirited fight the fish came to the back of the boat, became uncontrollable and was cut off by the propeller. By now it was nearly nightfall, so the trolling tackle was exchanged for drifting rigs. One rig was baited with dead bluefish and the other sported a prototype 3-D printed soft plastic cucumber-colored tinker mackerel imitation the pair has been testing nicknamed "Stinky Tinky." It did not take long before the line baited with the bluefish came tight to a strong fish but it turned into a 10-foot hammerhead that was released. After the lines were reset and deployed Hiles decided to take a nap. The pair had agreed Hiles would do "all the cranking" before the pair left the

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dock. Hiles had fought one big tuna to the back of the boat before it was cut off and the 10-foot hammerhead. It was now about 3 AM. Hiles nap was interrupted in less than an hour, just after 4 AM, as Landis's shouted, "We're on!" Hiles took the screaming rod with the mackerel proto-type lure and was getting situated in the fighting chair as Landis began cranking in the other line baited with whole bluefish. That line suddenly came alive as it was grabbed by an estimated 100-pound mako shark. Once Landis and the mako parted ways it was down to business on the bluefin.

Hiles was in the fighting chair and all other lines had been cleared. The huge tuna dove straight toward the bottom on a sustained run. Lucky for the angler the bluefin was hooked on heavy unlimited tackle, an eight-foot, unlimited class rod built by Anglers Envy that was matched to a two-speed Penn 130vsx spooled with nearly a mile of mono ending with two-hundred yards of hollow core braid as final backing. Hiles would need all the mono and part of "the last resort" backing before the tuna could be stopped. Once stopped it was a matter of heavy-lift cranking to the surface and the back of the boat. The terminal end of the rig was designed to handle large fish and consisted of two hundred feet of 250-pound Momoi extra-hard monofilament leader, a Spro 370-pound wind on swivel on one end, and an Eagle Claw 10/0 Trokar hook on the other. The fish was gaffed and waiting at the tuna door in just under an hour! With the tuna secured the pair rested while they waited for sunrise and discussed how they might fit the fish through the tuna door. It would take the pair 2 hours and some improvising to squeeze the giant bluefin through the tuna door and on the deck for the ride back to Rudee Inlet.

Once inside Rudee Inlet they headed straight for the Virginia Beach Fishing Center where the tuna was weighed and registered. Hiles record setting bluefin tuna weighed 708 pounds, measured 114-1/2 inches in total length, 109 inches in straight line fork length while sporting an impressive 77-1/4 inch girth.

So what does someone do with 700-pounds plus of recreationally caught bluefin tuna that cannot be sold and does not freeze well? As was done with the prior state record bluefin, caught by Chase Robinson, word was spread through social media that portions of the tuna would be given away—just bring something to contain the fresh bluefin tuna. In short order a large crowd gathered at the Fishing Center to view the record-setting fish, maybe take home dinner and none of the fish went to waste.







