

# The Sport Fishery in the British Virgin Islands

RANDOLPH M. WALTERS

*Fisheries Division*

*Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment*

*Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I.*

The British Virgin Islands (BVI) are a British Crown Colony situated about 65 miles east of Puerto Rico comprised of 60 islands, rocks and cays with a total land area of 59 square miles. The BVI's portion of the submerged shelf, that is shared with Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands (USVI), covers an area of approximately 948 square nautical miles. The islands most significant to the territory's economy are Tortola, Virgin Gorda, Anegada and Jost Van Dyke. The islands have very limited natural resources except for their seas and caves. Soils are shallow and there are no known commercially valuable mineral resources.

Tourism is the pivotal sector. While the BVI has a population of about 12,000 persons, almost eight times as many tourists visit the islands every year (Table 1). The hotel capacity in 1978 was 538 rooms and the number of charter boats was 279 boats. The gross domestic profit (GDP) was estimated to be U.S. \$29 million in 1978. It should be realised that the yachting sector of tourist arrivals in the BVI is estimated at approximately 60% of the total tourist arrivals (Table 1).

Table 1. Tourist arrivals and estimated expenditure (US \$) during 1977-1981\*

Year	Total Tourists		Charter Boat Tourists	
	Arrival	Expenditure (1000's)	Arrival	Expenditure (1000's)
1977	58,606	18,600	30,073	9,400
1978	75,916	23,700	37,818	12,500
1979	97,709	50,280	57,573	35,800
1980	93,260	58,800	58,650	42,800
1981	90,615	74,200	52,690	56,000

\*Source: BVI Statistic Department.

The first game fishing tournament in the British Virgin Islands is said to have been held in 1968, although the first organised tournament i.e. the annual Chief Minister's tournament was held in 1969. In its early days, the tournament was usually on a Saturday, Sunday and Monday in October; prior to the Columbus Day holiday celebration on the U.S. Virgin Islands. This was of course a ploy to lure St. Thomas boats over to the BVI and it worked. The first blue marlin ever caught in a BVI competition was boated during the 1969 Chief Minister's tournament by Gloria Applegate who

has held quite a few world records. By 1971, there was tremendous enthusiasm for game fishing in the territory inspiring a small group of sportsmen to form the first Angler's Club. It was a very strong group from the outset with a membership of over 70 in the first year. Although many small and novel tournaments were held in the early days the only major competition was the Chief Minister's Tournament. Although technically only one world record has been registered on the International Game Fishing Association's (IGFA) list i.e. Mrs. Clarke's king mackerel, women's class 30 lbs., a 67 lb. in 1980, some 13 other world records have been declared from the shelf shared by Puerto Rico, U.S. and the BVI for king mackerel, blue marlin, skipjack tuna and wahoo.

### PRESENT SITUATION

Beginning this year, the Angler's Club merged the two previously held annual tournaments i.e. The Governor's and The Chief Minister's Tournaments and re-named it The BVI Annual International Billfish Tournament. As can be seen on Table 2, the results compare favourably and are in fact far superior to the more established and better known Billfish Tournament in the region i.e. The International Billfish Tournament hosted yearly by the Club Nautico of San Juan, Puerto Rico.

In addition to the annual International Billfish Tournament there are sporadically held smaller tournaments for wahoo, kingfish, bone fish, tuna, sailfish etc. usually organised by the various resorts within the BVI.

Table 2. Landings: annual international billfish tournament 1982<sup>x</sup>

Results for Puerto Rico and B.V.I.	1982	
	B.V.I.	Puerto Rico
Total tournament boats	9	86
Total blue marlin landed	25	43
Largest blue marlin boarded (lb)	436	460
Ave wt blue marlin boarded (lb)	275	130
Ave No. blue marlin caught/boat	2.8	0.5

### FISHING AREAS AND SEASONS

For skippers who are not familiar with the BVI waters the following outlines popular fishing areas in the BVI shelf: (1) *The South "drop off"*—this area is located about 1.5-2 nautical miles south-east of the BVI chain, extending from the waters east of St. John USVI to Horse-shoe Reef, Anegada. (2) *Anegada*—these fishing grounds are an extension of the south drop off, they extend around the eastern side of Anegada. (3) *The North drop off and The Saddle*—this is a very popular blue marlin area starting due north of Jost Van Dyke and extending due east along the 100 fathom line towards Anegada. (4) *The Sea Mount*—otherwise known as Barracuda Banks, this sea plateau is about 25 fm from the surface and is located 15 mi north east of

Ginger Island; it is approximately 8 mi long and 5 mi wide. This area is notorious for most of the popular game fishes.

The peak fishing seasons for the fish species of interest to sport fishermen are given in Table 3.

#### FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The Fisheries Division of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment has been established only very recently (July 1980) with the assistance of the UNDP/FAO-BVI/79/001 Assistance to Fisheries Project. The necessary steps have been initiated to ensure the eventual implementation of a comprehensive fisheries resource management program for the BVI by mid 1983. The sport fishery is included

Table 3. Fishing Season\*

Scientific Name	Common Name	Fish Season
<i>Makaira nigricans</i>	Blue Marlin	Mar - May
<i>Tetrapturus albidus</i>	White Marlin	Feb - Mar
<i>Istiophorus albicans</i>	Sailfish	Dec - Jan
<i>Coryphaena hippurus</i>	Dolphin	Mar - May
<i>Acanthocybium solandri</i>	Wahoo	Year Round
<i>Scomberomorus cavalla</i>	King Mackerel	Year Round
<i>Thunnus obesus</i>	Alison Tuna	Year Round
<i>Katsuwonus pelamis</i>	Skip Jack Tuna	Year Round
<i>Euthynnus alletteratus</i>	Bonito	Year Round
<i>Albula vulpes</i>	Bonefish	Year Round
<i>Megalopas atlanticus</i>	Tarpon	Year Round
<i>Trachinotus falcatus</i>	Permit	Year Round

\* Source: B.V.I. Angler's Club.

in this program which, apart from establishing the basic resource management procedures aimed principally at gathering pertinent statistical information (catch per unit effort and total landing per area, etc.) will include a comprehensive set of recommendations which, if adopted, could serve as a blue print for the future development of the sport fishery in the BVI.

It is common knowledge that due to the close proximity of the USVI and Puerto Rico the waters of the BVI are frequently fished by boats based and registered in those territories. It is therefore quite likely that many of the world records claimed by these neighboring territories' sportfishermen came in fact from BVI waters. This situation is further complicated by an unregulated exploitation of the marine re-

sources of the BVI by sportfishing and yacht cruising tourists who frequent the BVI waters in ever increasing numbers.

Consequently, a much closer and hopefully more effective cooperative effort among these territories is an essential pre-requisite to a more orderly and equitable sharing of their commonly shared marine resources. An appointment of a BVI representative to the International Game Fishing Association (IGFA) and a closer cooperation with other regional and international organisation could be a first step towards that goal.