

Select a tournament weigh-in site immediately adjacent to good-quality water. This will facilitate live release of the fish after weighing, and will provide a source of good quality water for anglers fishing from boats with livewell systems that rely solely on the input of outside water for aeration. The weigh-in site should be in a shaded area to facilitate temperature control of holding tank water.

### Organization

All rules and procedures should be clearly and succinctly stated. Printed copies of these rules and procedures should be distributed to each contestant. Announce your weigh-in procedures before the start of the tournament and at the end of the fishing day before the weigh-in commences. It is important that the fish be out of aerated holding facilities for the shortest time possible. To avoid contestants waiting in line with fish in bags, tell the contestants when to bag their fish and bring them for weigh-in. Arrange your weigh-in site so that contestants can quickly move their fish from the boat livewell to the weigh-in facilities.

Have plenty of people to work. Under the most organized conditions for a tournament with 40 to 60 boats, at least eight people are required: two people to distribute bags and keep contestants coming to the scales, one person to keep the contestants organized at the weigh-in stations, one person judging size and live-dead, one person reading the scale, one person recording data, and two people releasing fish. Additional workers are desirable. All people assisting with the tournament should be fully cognizant of all rules and procedures.

### Alternatives To Weigh-in Tournaments

The above guidelines will help tournament organizers attain high survival of tournament-caught fish. Research on survival of tournament-caught largemouth bass indicates, in properly conducted tournaments, that mortality of the fish is primarily the result of the improper design and use of boat livewells. Therefore any procedure that results in use of better livewell facilities, provides incentive to properly maintain and use a livewell system, reduces the number of fish held in a livewell, and reduces the time fish are held in the livewell will increase the survival of tournament-caught fish.

The following alternatives to the standard "fish for 9 hours and weigh your fish" tournaments may improve the live-release rate of tournament-caught bass. The ideas presented here have been collected from a variety of sources including state agency fisheries biologists, bass fishing clubs, and individual fishermen. All these alternatives certainly would not

be implemented in every tournament, and this list is undoubtedly far from complete. These alternatives are presented for your consideration to improve the survival of tournament-caught bass in your next tournament.

**Dead Fish Penalty** — Most tournaments impose a dead fish penalty (typically 2 ounces is subtracted from the total weight for each fish weighed in dead) as an incentive to participating anglers to maintain their catch alive. Higher penalties may provide a stronger incentive; however, higher penalties inappropriately penalize the conscientious angler who only occasionally will weigh in a fish that died due to a hooking injury. An incremental (sliding scale), dead-fish penalty may provide a stronger incentive to the anglers. For example, one dead fish receives a 2-ounce penalty, the second dead fish receives a penalty of 4 ounces (6 ounces total penalty for the two dead fish), and the third dead fish receives a penalty of 6 ounces (12 ounces total penalty for the three dead fish), etc.

Do not impose a "live fish only" rule. This encourages anglers to replace dead fish with live fish and can result in removal of more fish from the lake or river than would normally result for the usually low rate of mortality resulting from your tournament. On the other hand, a rule allowing the culling of live fish only would keep the mortality of tournament-caught fish at a minimum.

**Functional Livewell Rule** — Require an aerated livewell; it is impossible to maintain fish alive without one. However, aerated livewells do little to insure survival of fish if the livewell is too small, has a poorly designed water circulation system, if the aeration system fails and there is no back-up system, or if the anglers are unaware of, or negligent in, the proper use of a livewell. An appropriate dead-fish penalty will provide some incentive to the anglers to properly maintain and use their boat livewell. Rather than simply requiring an aerated livewell, require a minimum total livewell volume. As a rule of thumb, total livewell capacity should be at least 1 gallon of water for 2 pounds of fish. If your tournament is held on a lake where the two anglers in a boat may catch 30 pounds of bass, the minimum permissible total livewell volume would be 15 gallons for each boat. This rule should not deter anglers from fishing, because an accessory livewell can be built for any boat from a 48-quart or larger cooler and a bilge pump<sup>2</sup>. Rather than require a boat simply to have an aerated livewell, require boats to have *functional* livewell aeration systems. Livewell operation can be checked before the anglers leave the launch site. Livewell pump failure does occur, but it is not an acceptable excuse for

<sup>2</sup> Schramm, H.L., Jr. 1985. Keeping your catch alive. Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611. Circular 691.