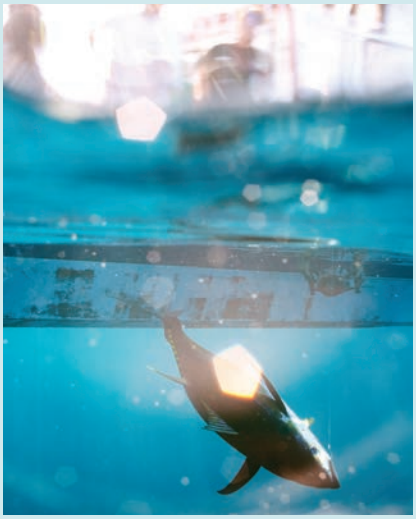
NOAA FISHERIES



Catch and Release Fishing

DO

- Keep the fish in the water as much as possible
- Use circle and barbless hooks to enhance survival
- Assist in the recovery process of the fish prior to release
- Learn the proper release technique for the type of fish you're pursuing
- Learn how to use descending devices for fish that are bloated from barotrauma

DON'T

- Don't simply toss a fish back into the water
- Don't play the fish to exhaustion
- Don't try to pull the hook out of a gill or gut hooked fish
- Don't squeeze the fish or handle it more than necessary

Catch and Release Best Practices

Releasing recreationally caught fish to fight another day helps ensure there will be fish to catch today, tomorrow, and for anglers in the future. Catch and release fishing done correctly helps preserve your sport.

What Do I Need To Know?

Releasing a fish in a way which improves its probability of surviving is easy to do. Using the right gear and techniques will improve the chances that your fish will survive. Research your chosen fishing location and be prepared for the species you are pursuing. The right tools make releasing fish easier and more effective, so keep de-hookers, descending devices, nets, cameras, etc., close at hand to limit time on deck and the amount of stress a fish will experience as you release it.

Important Catch and Release Reminders

- Never play a fish to exhaustion. Use tackle of sufficient strength for the size of your quarry.
- If possible, dehook the fish in the water. If a hook is swallowed and you can't easily remove it, cut the line as close to the hook as possible and leave the hook in the fish.
- Circle hooks, barbless hooks or hooks with crimped barbs can increase survival and make removal easier.
- Lost stainless steel hooks may stay in the ecosystem for a long time; consider using other metal hooks that will corrode faster and cause less damage to wildlife.
- If you must remove a fish from the water, keep air exposure to a minimum. Less than 60 seconds is ideal.
- Handle the fish as little as possible and only use wet hands. Use an appropriate release tool.
- If you remove a fish from the water, try to support its weight along the length of its body. If sluggish, resuscitate a fish by facing it into the current or moving it back and forth until it regains strength before releasing it.
- Use a soft knotless mesh or a rubber landing net which is less damaging to eyes, fins, scales and the protective mucous membrane.
- Many fish, when reeled in from depth, suffer from barotrauma (bloating) and can no longer regulate their buoyancy. Without assistance to get back to depth of capture, these fish may die. Use descending devices such as weighted upside down milk crates, inverted barbless hooks and weights, or commercial fish descenders to return fish to depth and increase survival. For information about various descending tools read the California Sea Grant information on barotrauma: http://www.usc.edu/org/seagrant/Publications/PDFs/BAROTRAUMA-BRO-3-30.pdf

Where Can I Get More Information?

To get more information about catch and release best practices or to learn about other issues involving recreational anglers visit: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/management/recreational/

For more information about barotrauma, visit the Southwest Fisheries Science Center website: http://swfsc.noaa.gov/barotrauma/

The future of sportfishing is in your hands. Pass it on!