

All we are saying is give fish a chance

One of the best ways for anglers to show their love for coastal resources is to help preserve them.

It is important that anglers employ these practices every time they fish to reduce the likelihood of post-release mortality so that a fish released today can be caught again tomorrow.

Planning

When heading out for a day of fishing, make sure you have the equipment you need to release any fish you may catch.

A rubberized landing net, rubber gloves, needle nose pliers or dehooking tool, and descending devices or venting tools are items that you may use to give fish a better chance to survive when released.

Fishing

Select tackle that matches the size of your targeted species. Matching fishing line, rod weight and reel drag to allow for shorter fight times can reduce the added stress angling has on a fish by decreasing the amount and intensity of physical activity the fish exerts during a fight. Research online or talk to local fishermen if unsure about what tackle to use for certain species.

The type of hooks you use can influence the survival potential of released fish. A fish hooked in the jaw has a better chance of surviving than a fish hooked in the stomach. Circle hooks and barbless hooks increase the likelihood of jaw hooking and aid in quick release once the fish is boated.

Don't play a fish to exhaustion. This only lessens the chance for survival. Tighten the drag and land the fish as quickly as possible.

When landing the fish, use a rubberized landing net and rubber gloves to avoid removing the slime



layer from the fish's body. When holding the fish, keep the fish under water as much as possible. If it is a large fish make sure to support the fish's body in a horizontal position.

Keep the fish out of the water for as little time as possible. If taking a picture, have your camera ready before the fish is landed so that you can return the fish to the water with minimal stress.

Use rubber gloves to hold the fish and a de-hooker or needle nose pliers to remove the hook.

Fish can become stressed very quickly in warm summertime waters and any added physical effort, like interacting with fishing gear, can quickly tip the physiological balance of stress into the lethal range. It is especially important during these times to use best fishing practices to release fish. Anglers can reduce their impact on fishing mortality by using tackle that reduces the likelihood of deep hooking and adjusting fishing practices to allow for quicker retrieves and releases.

Deep-water Fishing

Reeling fish in from deeper water can cause barotrauma to the fish. Barotrauma occurs when a fish is reeled up from considerable depth and the gasses in its swim bladder expand to the point that the fish's eyes can bulge out and the stomach and intestines can be protruding out of the fish. This obvious trauma can lead directly to mortality from the injuries. It can lead indirectly to mortality by immobilizing the fish and making it more susceptible to predation.

When barotrauma occurs, returning the fish to deeper water rapidly, known as recompression, is the best option, using some type of descender device. Fish descender devices attach to the fish's mouth and descend the fish back to deeper water using a weight. There are several types of fish descender devices on the market or anglers can make their own. The deeper in water the fish is released, the greater the chance of survival.



Attaching a fish descending device to a red grouper

If rapid descent is not possible, a less preferable option is called venting. Venting releases the gases trapped in the body of deep-water fish, allowing the fish to swim back to its natural habitat depth. You should hold the fish gently, (but firmly enough to keep it from thrashing), on its side. Insert the venting tool at a 45-degree angle about 1-inch to 2 inches back from the base of the pectoral fin. Do not puncture the stomach of a fish when venting.

The venting tool should only be inserted deep enough to release the gases. You can hear the gas escaping and will notice the body deflating. Gently press on the abdomen of the fish to help expel the gas if the fish is extremely bloated.



Venting a red snapper



Fish descender device

Hold the fish with the head pointed downward and move the fish back and forth to let water flow through the mouth and over the gills until the fish is capable of swimming on its own.

Be Aware

Obey fishing and boating laws and treat other anglers and boaters with courtesy.

Call the N.C. Marine Patrol at 800-682-2632 if you see fishing violations or are uncertain of any laws.

Mobile Apps



DMF RecGuide



FishRules Android



FishRules iPhone

Scan the **DMF QR** code to read the latest size and bag limits on your mobile phone.

If you do not have a QR code reader, go to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries website at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/>

Scan **FishRules** QR code to download app for your device.



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Best Practices for the Ethical Angler



A GUIDE TO RESPONSIBLE FISHING