



## **Best Practices** for the Safe Release of your Fish

It's ok to keep fish that you are allowed under fishing regulations. However, at some point all anglers will be faced with returning fish to the water that they are not allowed to keep – due to size, season, or creel limits – or if they are voluntarily practicing catch-and-release.

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**Nearly ½ billion saltwater fish are caught each year with 59% being returned to the water. Improving survival of these fish by even 1% will save 3 million fish annually! In freshwater 84% of anglers voluntarily release fish that they could have kept.**

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Implementing “Best Practices” for releasing fish in *is the right thing to do* and will help ensure sound fisheries in the future. Live release in many fisheries (bass and trout for example) has contributed to healthy and sustainable fishery resources.

## **Best Practices for Releasing Fish**

**Plan Ahead** - Expect to release fish on any given trip and prepare the equipment necessary to do so.

**Avoidance** - Develop skills to target the size and species you desire.

**Appropriate Gear** - Use gear suited to the size of fish that you are trying to catch. Use circle hooks where recommended and be aware that fishing techniques are different from “J” style hooks.

**Landing Fish** - Don't play fish to exhaustion.

**Handling Fish** - Use knotless rubberized landing nets and rubberized gloves, to avoid removing the slime layer from their body.

- Keep the fish horizontal; support the body when lifting large fish.
- **DON'T DROP THE FISH** onto hard surfaces or long distances!

**Releasing Fish** - If needed, use a release tool (dehookers, recompression tools) to minimize handling.

### **Time is of the essence!**

Release fish as soon as practical and do not keep them out of the water longer than necessary.

## **Deep Water Release**

Saltwater fish caught in deep water may be suffering from “barotrauma,” a buildup of swim bladder gases that makes it difficult for them to go back down. Generally, fish caught deeper than 30 feet will suffer some effects. Follow these basic tips:

**Assess condition while reeling in fish** - Signs of barotrauma include:

- Sluggish swimming.
- Eyes bulging (“pop eye”).
- Stomach protruding from mouth.
- Bloated mid section.

If the fish appears normal release it without removing it from the water.

**Recompression** - Rapidly returning fish to depth is the method of choice for returning barotrauma affected fish. A variety of tools are on the market, including descender devices, release weights & baskets, etc.

**Return to Depth** - Return fish to the depth of capture. If catching fish at very deep depths, returning them as deep as possible will dramatically improve survival.

**Venting** - If rapid descent is not possible, venting is another option. Use established guidelines for venting such as found at <http://catchandrelease.org>.

**Note that the fish's stomach may protrude from its mouth. Do NOT puncture the stomach.**