

# Tips on how to handle your catch

Learn how to handle your catch so fish released back into the water have the best chance of survival.

Follow the instructions to make sure you are handling your catch properly.

More information can be obtained from the [PIRSA website](#)



## When to release fish

You must release fish back into the water that are:

Under legal permitted length or more than the legal permitted length

Caught during a closed season

Are over your personal daily bag limit or daily boat limit

Are a fully protected species

Fishers can also choose to release their catch to conserve fish stock

Undersized, protected, or unwanted fish must be released to the water quickly, carefully, and alive

## Avoid catching undersize fish

Fish usually swim in schools of similar sizes. Change your fishing spot if you are catching undersized fish

Use larger hooks. Smaller fish are less likely to take large hooks

## Catching and landing

These instructions will help you catch and land your fish to improve their chances of survival.

Choose tackle that will land your target fish in the shortest possible time

Don't use tight lines when targeting large fish. This can result in bust-offs and stressed fish

Avoid long playing times that exhaust fish. Exhausting fish can cause them to die even after they are released alive

Remove small fish of up to 1 kg from the water by lifting the line

Remove larger fish using a knotless landing net. Do not use a knotted landing net because they remove protective slime and scales from the fish

Never use a gaff on fish to be released

## Handling Sharks and Rays

All sharks and rays not planned to be retained, should be immediately returned to the water

Visit the PIRSA recreational fishing for sharks and rays page to find out more information about best practice gear and handling techniques

## Releasing fish

These instructions will help you successfully release fish

Unhook fish when they are still in the water

Handle fish with wet hands. This will reduce damage to the protective slime on the surface of the fish

Place fish on a cool and wet surface. Avoid hot and dry surfaces

Move quickly. Reducing time the fish spends out of water will help to reduce trauma to the fish

Cut the line if a fish is gut or gill-hooked. Hooks are replaceable and you will not damage the fish by removing the hook

Carefully use fish grips when restraining fish. Avoid grips with inbuilt scales because they hold the fish vertically and can damage the fish

Hold the fish horizontally and support its body when gently placing it into the water

Support larger fish with a hand under the head and belly to minimise damage to the backbone

## When photographing your catch

Reduce trauma to your catch when you want to take a photograph with these tips:

Have your camera easily within reach

Decide early if you want to take a photo and have someone ready with the camera

Lift the fish horizontally and support its weight at all times. Never lift the fish vertically by the jaw

Minimise the time the fish is out of the water

Release the fish gently back into the water as soon as you've photographed it

## Measuring and weighing your fish

Measure your fish instead of weighing it. Measuring is much less stressful for the fish

Use a wet ruler with a stopper on the end to rest the nose against

Do not use scales that hang the fish by the jaw if you are planning to release the fish.

These scales can do damage to jaw and gills. They also stress the backbone and internal organs

Use a sling to support the fish horizontally if you are weighing it

Use wet hands or a wet cloth to protect the fish eyes and gills

## Returning the fish to the water

Hold the fish gently in the water.

Let the fish leave your hands with a flick of its tail. A strong flick indicates a better chance of survival.

Manually move the fish through the water if it does not move off from your hands.

## For fish you are keeping

Humanely deal with fish you are keeping:

Place the fish on ice immediately after capture. This will naturally anaesthetize the fish

It will also improve the eating quality of the meat and reduce spoilage

Spike the fish by inserting a knife or spike in the center of the fish's head, immediately behind the eyes

This reduces stress and the fish will give better quality flesh that keeps longer

## Protecting yourself

Wear gloves to protect against cuts and spines

Wash your hands thoroughly after handling all fish