





Saltwater Fishing: TIPS FOR REDUCING INJURY TO FISH WHEN FISHING

Modern sport fishing causes injury to fish through the acts of hooking, landing and unhooking the catch. While this is generally not a problem for fish that will be kept for eating, serious injury to fish that are released back into the water can result in the death of that fish. Many fish are released each year, both because of management restrictions and due to the increasing popularity of catch-and-release-fishing. The responsible angler needs to employ practices that reduce unintentional injury to his or her quarry.

- Fish slime protects their skin. A dry rag or dry skin removes this protective coating. Always wet hands before handling fish. Better still, use a de-hooker to release the fish at boat-side without touching it. If you use a landing net, use a “knotless” one; the knots remove slime and scales and scratch fish skin.
- Never land a large fish that is thrashing wildly about (still “green”). Putting such a fish in your boat or on the beach creates a chance that the fish will injure itself with its movements.
- On the other hand, never fight a fish to exhaustion. Land it as quickly as possible without bringing in a “green” fish. Avoid the use of ultra-light tackle, unless making a serious attempt to set a record. Instead, use the heaviest tackle necessary to beat the fish while still allowing you to enjoy the experience.
- Always hold a fish firmly when handling to reduce the chance that you will drop it.
- Never “throw” a fish back into the water. Instead, lay it gently into the water and let it swim away. If necessary, move the fish back and forth to move water over its gills until it recovers and can swim off on its own.
- Fish that are to be released should be put back into the water at once. Snapshots should be taken quickly while the fish is out of the water for unhooking. Do not leave the fish out of water while looking for the camera!
- Avoid the use of treble hooks. Many lures used in saltwater are available with single hooks, or can be modified by removing the trebles and replacing them with singles. If replacing trebles is impractical, as with many swimming plugs, consider cutting off one or more of the hook points. Substitute single-hook lures in place of swimming plugs with multiple treble hooks. For example, some soft plastic lures have similar shapes and characteristics, but employ a single hook. 
- Use barb-less hooks when practical, but especially when catch-and-release fishing. Hooks with barbs can be modified by crushing the barbs down with heavy pliers or filing them off.
- Use non-offset circle hooks when bait fishing for many species. These hooks generally will set in the corner of the fish’s mouth and not in the gut or throat area. When fishing with these hooks, do not “set the hook.” Instead, let the line come tight and simply start reeling. 
- Do not gaff a fish unless it is your intention to kill and keep it.

For more information, contact:

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