

From the Fisher's Mouth

27th December 2009

With so many people fishing over summer, significantly increased numbers of fish are caught. Whilst we would all like to catch large mature fish, most of what get caught are juveniles, protected species (such as trout cod or river blackfish), or fish caught and released for sport. Whatever the reason, careful handling of the fish intended for release



is vital to ensure the survival of the fish destined for release, so that it can continue to grow and hopefully reproduce.

When a fish is brought to the boat, the first priority is to check where it is hooked. If the hook(s) have been swallowed into the gut, leave the fish in the water and cut the line as close as possible to the hook. Fish are resilient and are often able to either regurgitate or have the hook pass through their gut

completely. Never lift a fish out of the water without support as this 'hanging' cause's irreparable damage to internal organs.

If you do need to lift a fish into the boat, use a 'fish friendly' net such as the *Environet* which doesn't rub off the fishes protective slime coating. Also, make sure that the deck of the boat is wet and cool. A hot boat deck is lethal to a creature that is used to more temperate climates.

When handling fish, wet your hands and support it with one hand securing the jaw (lip grippers are ideal for this purpose) and the other hand under its belly. For large fish, unless you are experienced, you are better off leaving it in the water as the bigger the fish the more likely it is to stress and die.

Lastly, if you intend to throw the fish back, keep it out of the water for the bare minimum of time, or better still remove the hook whilst the fish is still in the water. Fish don't breathe air and require water to recover from the fight.

Whilst these techniques I apply to freshwater fish, they work on saltwater species and fish from flathead to marlin. Handle them carefully and that fish you release will be there for someone else in the future.

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