



Department of
Primary Industries and
Regional Development

*We're working for
Western Australia.*

Catch Care

Responsible fishing guidelines



An underwater photograph showing a large school of small, silvery fish swimming in clear blue water. The fish are densely packed in the upper half of the frame and more sparsely distributed in the lower half. The background is a deep blue, and there are some dark, rocky structures visible in the lower right corner.

By taking **appropriate care** at every stage of fishing, we can all **play our part** to ensure we get the most out of our aquatic resources and help ensure there will be plenty of **fish for the future**.

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Caring for your catch

Western Australia is home to some of the most exciting and varied recreational fishing opportunities in the world. With around 630,000 people fishing recreationally each year, it is part of our lifestyle. It also makes a contribution to our economy and attracts thousands of visitors to regional WA.

However, our aquatic resources are not unlimited and it's important that recreational fishers fish responsibly and care for their catch. This includes minimising any potential injuries to fish to be released by using appropriate gear and returning fish to the water carefully and immediately.

For fish kept for the table, it is important to make the most of the catch, to keep it fresh and avoid wasting edible flesh.

This guide outlines best practice for what you can do on your next fishing trip to help protect our ocean resources and ensure sustainable, quality fishing experiences now and into the future.



‘Catch care’ is a **practical** way of helping ensure there are enough **fish for future** generations.



Catching fish

There are many ways to care for your catch while fishing, starting with using the right equipment for the species you are targeting. This will decrease the chance of injury to the fish, increase their chance of survival if released, and produce better eating quality for those you keep.

Hooks

Reducing hook injuries improves the survival chances of fish returned to the water. Deep hooking in the gills, throat or gut causes the greatest mortality as the hook can damage vital organs.

Using larger hooks or hook types that increase the chances of lip hooking, such as circle hooks and long shank hooks, reduces the chance of the fish swallowing the bait compared to narrower designs such as the J-hook.

Using lures or jigs rather than bait with the right type of hook can also significantly reduce deep hooking. Use large single inline hooks on hard body lures where possible.

Avoid using treble hooks as they can cause injuries to fish.

Barbless hooks help penetration and hooking, and are easier to remove, thus causing less damage to fish that are released. Buy barbless hooks from tackle shops or modify barbed hooks by crushing the barbs with a pair of pliers as shown below.



Circle hook



Long shank hook



Hard body lure



Treble hook



1



2



3

A conventional barbed hook (1) can be easily debarbed by crushing with a pair of pliers (2). Debarbed hook (3).

Fishing line

Use an appropriate class line to minimise stress on the fish.

Environmentally friendly materials

Use environmentally friendly fishing tackle whenever possible such as non-stainless steel hooks, lead free sinkers, timber or cork floats.

Shark depredation

Sharks can be attracted to your catch and even take it before you have a chance to land the fish.

Although this is frustrating, sharks play an important part in the ecosystem.

Some ways you can mitigate shark bite-offs:

- If depredation starts to occur, move fishing spots immediately.
- Consider using shark deterrent devices.
- Avoid areas known to be depredation hotspots.

Report shark sightings to Water Police on 9442 8600 or through the SharkSmart WA app.



Shark depredation is common in WA waters



Handling fish

By handling fish appropriately, you can reduce their level of stress and decrease the chances of injury, ensuring a better chance of survival if they are released.

Minimise the time out of water

If possible, keep the fish in the water while removing hooks and taking any photos. If you do need to take the fish out of the water, do it quickly and return the fish back into the water as soon as possible.

Landing net

Use a soft, knotless landing net to minimise the loss of protective slime and scales. This will increase the fish's chance of post-release survival.



Support fish

Always support the body of the fish and do not hold a fish vertically by its tail, mouth or gills as this can cause harm to the fish.

- Use a clean wet rag or hands to avoid injury and loss of scales and protective slime.
- Place the fish on a cool, wet surface, and avoid exposure to hot, dry surfaces wherever possible.
- Use a foam landing mat or wet towel/brag mat to avoid bruising the fish.
- Don't touch a fish's eyes or gills as they can be easily damaged.



Releasing fish

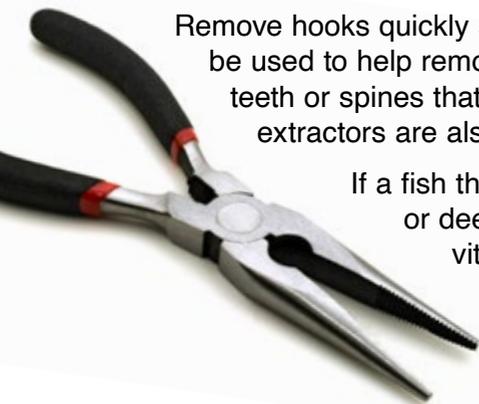
By using appropriate techniques to release fish you increase their chances of survival by reducing damage to vital organs and getting oxygen to the gills as quickly as possible.

Gently release undersize, protected or unintended fish carefully and immediately by following these steps.

Removing hooks

Remove hooks quickly and carefully. Long-nosed pliers can also be used to help remove hooks, especially for fish with sharp teeth or spines that need to be avoided. Dedicated hook extractors are also available from tackle shops.

If a fish that needs to be released is gut-hooked or deep-hooked, leave the hook in place as vital organs could be damaged in trying to remove it. In this situation, cut the line as close as possible to the hook to maximise the fish's chance of survival. Using hooks made of materials that quickly corrode may help them pass through the fish quicker.



Revive fatigued fish

If you release a fish and it lies on its side or gradually sinks, it may be tired and lacking oxygen. Before release, gently cradle the fish in the water, head pointed in the direction of the current, or if in a boat, have it move slowly forward to push water over its gills so that it can get enough oxygen to recover. The fish will indicate when it is OK by giving a few flicks and swimming out of your hands.

For demersal (bottom-dwelling) fish species that may be suffering from barotrauma, use an appropriate release weight to return the fish to the bottom and increase its chance of survival.



Barotrauma

Just like SCUBA divers, some 'demersal' (bottom-dwelling) species, such as West Australian dhufish, can be susceptible to decompression damage or 'barotrauma'.



Fish showing clear signs of barotrauma, including bulging eyes and everted stomach.

Barotrauma occurs when gases inside the fish's body expand due to a sudden decrease in pressure as it ascends to the surface, causing the fish's stomach to push out through its mouth or gills and its eyes to protrude. Damage to internal organs can also occur as a result.

Baldchin groper are particularly susceptible to barotrauma, even in relatively shallow water. Dhufish are also impacted, and mortality rates increase when capture occurs in depths greater than 20m. Pink snapper are more robust, but can still be impacted by the effects of barotrauma, particularly if caught in very deep water.

Release weight

Fish suffering from barotrauma may not be able to return to the bottom when released if their swim bladder remains inflated, so use an appropriate release weight.

A release weight is a weighted barbless hook to help demersal fish return to the ocean floor. It can be attached to an existing fishing rig, or used on a rod and reel or handline.

Pierce the hook through the fish's lip and gently lower the fish through the water.



Photo courtesy of Redfishwest

The release weight will help the fish sink to the depths despite an inflated swim bladder, maximising their chances of survival. The weight is detached by a tug on the line once the fish is on the seabed.

We do not recommend the venting method as an appropriate release practice due to injury to the fish and possible source of infection.

If you are line fishing for demersal fish from a boat anywhere in WA waters, you **must have an appropriate release weight on board.**

Avoid targeting demersal species for catch and release

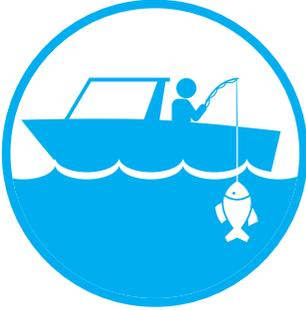
Catch and release fishing for demersal fish is not acceptable. Post-release mortality (fish dying after release) can be a significant factor that affects the sustainability of demersal fish stocks, especially if in recovery.

- Stop fishing for demersal fish once you have caught enough or reached your demersal bag limit. You can switch to target nearshore or pelagic species.
- When releasing demersal fish, use an appropriate release weight. Do this for all demersal fish, regardless of whether or not the fish displays visible barotrauma.
- Do not high-grade your catch. Discarding a smaller fish for a bigger one, known as high-grading, results in more fish being removed from the fishery, placing unnecessary pressure on our demersal fish stocks.



Guide for releasing fish

Caught something undersize or protected? Release it carefully and immediately, following these simple steps to ensure the fish has the best chance of survival.



1

If possible, keep fish in water when de-hooking and cut the line for swallowed hooks



2

If you must take the fish out of water, use a soft, knotless landing net



3

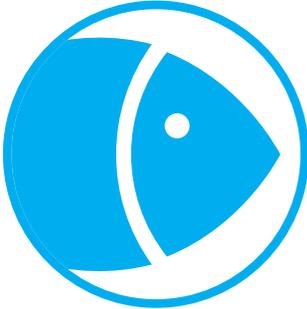
Use wet hands or a wet cloth when handling



4

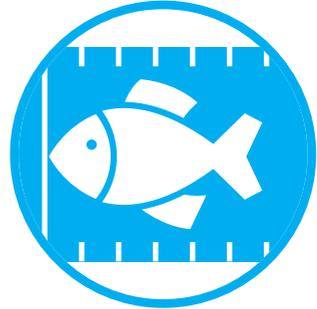
Hold the fish horizontally while supporting the body

All fishers can help ensure fish for the future by following the rules, including bag and size limits, and catch care guidelines.



5

Avoid touching
gills or eyes



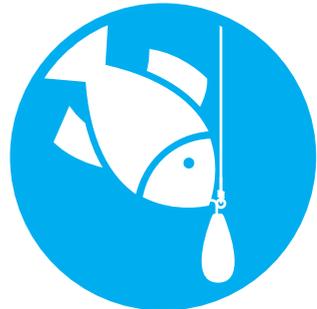
6

If required, lay fish on a wet
towel or brag mat, and not on
a hot, dry surface



7

Minimise time
fish are out of water



8

Use a release weight to return
undersize or unintentionally
caught demersal fish

Keeping fish

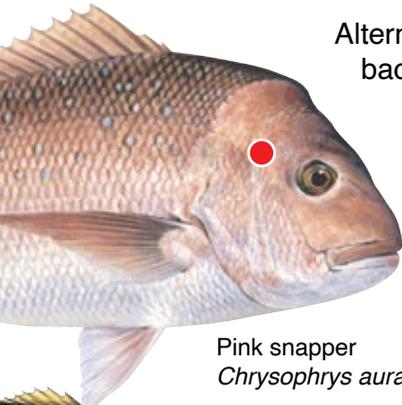
All fish being kept for consumption should be dispatched humanely and quickly once caught.

Dispatching fish

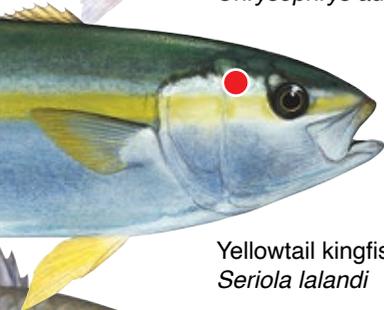
The recommended technique to dispatch fish humanely is known as *iki jime*. First, administer a blow to the head using a blunt tool, stunning the fish. Then spike the fish in the brain with a sharp instrument. This technique has been found to increase the quality of the kept fish.

Alternatively, cut the fish's throat and bend the head back, severing the spine.

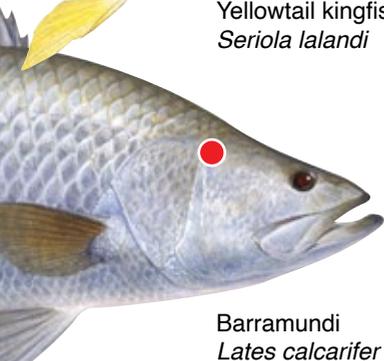
For crustaceans, put them in the freezer or immerse in chilled water for 20 minutes before cooking.



Pink snapper
Chrysophrys auratus



Yellowtail kingfish
Seriola lalandi



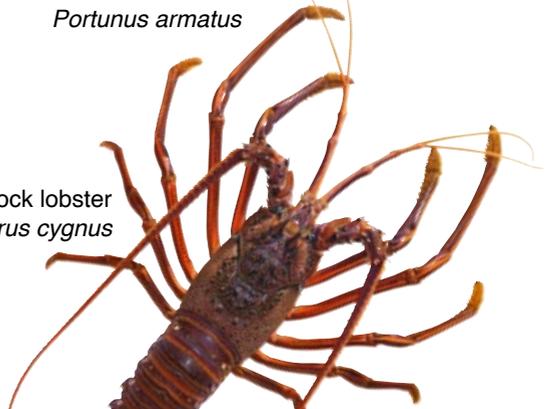
Barramundi
Lates calcarifer

● Iki jime location



Blue swimmer crab
Portunus armatus

Western rock lobster
Panulirus cygnus



Keeping your catch fresh

Once the fish have been humanely dispatched, bleed all fish intended for the table by cutting the throat or gill area. This improves the eating quality. If fish are to be kept whole, remove their gills and guts.

Fish begins to decay as soon as it is dispatched, so lowering the temperature will slow the rate of decay. The quicker you can chill the fish to zero degrees, the longer the shelf life will be.

To prevent spoilage and drying out, store your catch in a wet cotton or hessian bag in the shade, in an esky containing an ice slurry (3 parts water to 1 part ice) or in a portable freezer. Place fillets in waterproof plastic bags to keep the flavour in and the water out.

Fish is best eaten fresh so take only enough for your immediate consumption.

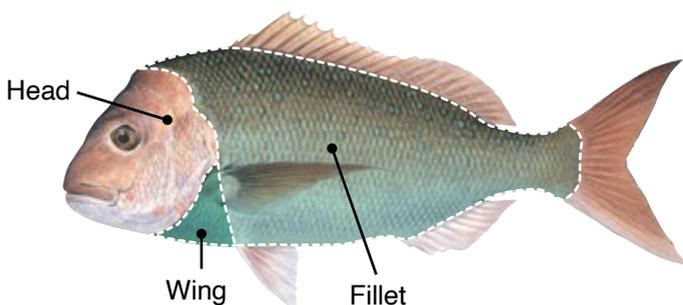


Filleting

Get the most out of your catch by filleting carefully to avoid wasting edible fish flesh.

Although many people discard the head, frame and wings, these parts are also edible and **do**

not count towards your possession limit. Fish frames can be used in stock and soups, and unwanted frames or heads of certain key species can be donated towards fisheries research to the Department's Send us Your Skeletons program (see fish.wa.gov.au/frames).



How to fillet a fish

For great tips and videos on how to fillet local WA fish with no waste, check out the Fillet Fish Australia website filletfish.com.au



1

Hold fish flat and pierce skin behind pectoral fin, slice across fish, cutting to, but not through the backbone.



2

Hold fish by head and run blade down backbone towards the tail.



3

Hold knife flat against backbone and push point through side of fillet. With knife protruding, cut through remaining fillet towards tail.



4

Peel fillet back with one hand while cutting it away from backbone with slicing motion, guide knife along bone structures and remove fillet from rib cage.



5

Turn fish over and hold flat, repeating procedure.



6

You now have two neat fillets plus the fish frame which can be used for stock or research.

Storing your catch

Refrigerator storage

- Once at your place of residence, scale, clean and gut whole fish (if required), then rinse under cold water and pat dry. Washing in salt water is better than chlorinated water for preserving fish and not tainting flavour. Place fish in a covered container, freezer bag or zip-lock bag in the coldest part of your fridge and use within two to three days. Force all the air out of the bag, as exposure to air hastens spoilage.
- Crustaceans should be consumed as soon as possible after capture.
- If storing cooked crustaceans, wrap them in foil and store as above.

Freezer storage

- All fish should be scaled, gutted, gilled and rinsed then dried before freezing.
- For best results either vacuum seal your fish or place fish in an airtight freezer bag, label and date. Fish can be frozen for up to six months (oily fish, fillets/cutlets for up to three months) at -18°C or colder.
- Gut and clean squid, cuttlefish and octopus and wrap in plastic before freezing.
- Label, date and freeze crustaceans, molluscs and other reef animals for up to three months at -18°C or colder.



Break or cut off 'wings' (pectoral fins) and save them to barbecue later.



Big fish have plenty of flesh in cheeks and back of the head.



Carcasses can be used to make soup or stew.

Responsible fishing

Keep it clean and pristine

You can do your part to keep our beaches and waterways pristine by:

- Using biodegradable fishing equipment and bait bags.
- Bringing your litter back with you. This includes food and bait containers, cigarette butts, and other waste. If you are fishing from a boat, keep waste onboard and dispose of once ashore.
- Unwanted fishing gear should be disposed of properly. Be especially careful of fishing line as it can entangle marine animals. Look out for fishing line disposal bins at many popular fishing spots.
- Do not dump fish offal near boat ramps or popular swimming beaches as decaying fish heads, frames and offal can attract sharks and impact on other beach users.
- If there is no bin available, take it home, then use to fertilise your garden or freeze and then dispose through your rubbish pickup.
- Fish skeletons of certain key species can also be donated for research to the Send us your skeletons program. Visit fish.wa.gov.au/frames for more information.



Interacting with seabirds and other wildlife

Seabirds and other animals may be attracted by fishing activity and are susceptible to becoming entangled in fishing lines and nets.

Albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters are among at-risk seabirds. Other animals that may be accidentally caught or tangled by fishing gear include turtles and marine mammals such as sea lions and dolphins.

If you do accidentally catch a wild animal, unhook and disentangle it gently.

If you accidentally injure or come across an injured animal, contact the Wildcare Helpline on (08) 9474 9055



Nuisance fish

Every fisher has probably caught a 'nuisance fish', such as the blowfish. Poisonous and a ferocious feeder, the blowfish is a common catch at some fishing spots. It is also a helpful scavenger that plays an important role in the ecosystem by cleaning up excess bait and berley.

If you catch one, return it to the water. Leaving dead blowfish on the shore can be potentially dangerous to dogs that may eat them. To avoid catching them, use bigger hooks and less berley, or move to another spot.



Pest species

Pests and diseases pose a serious threat to WA's aquatic environment, as well as the tourism, aquaculture and fishing industries.



Asian Paddle Crab
Charybdis japonica

If you catch or spot a pest species, such as the common carp (pictured right) or Asian Paddle Crab, you must not release this back into the waterway. Kill the fish humanely and dispose of it away from the waterway to avoid possibility of spreading diseases.



Make sure to contact FishWatch on 1800 815 507 to report sightings of pest species.

Follow the rules

You can play your part to ensure we have fish for the future by fishing responsibly and abiding by the recreational fishing rules, including size and bag limits.

It's easy to keep up to date with WA's recreational fishing rules online at fish.wa.gov.au/rules and in the Recreational fishing guide.

The Recfishwest App is another easy way to access WA's fishing rules even if you're out of phone range. The Recfishwest App is free to download from the Apple App Store and Google Play and has a useful Fish ID function to help identify any unfamiliar species.

Report any illegal fishing activities to FishWatch.



Hook up to the rec fishing rules

It's easy to keep up to date with Western Australia's recreational fishing rules. Whether it's for bag and size limits, seasonal closures or licences, all the rules are at your fingertips.

1. Web

Go to fish.wa.gov.au/rules for rules covering more than 180 fish species. Use the interactive maps to discover information about marine protected areas and common species by region.

2. App

The free Recfishwest app provides access to the rules even if you're out of phone range and has an easy fish identification feature.



3. Guide

Grab a copy or download from fish.wa.gov.au/guide

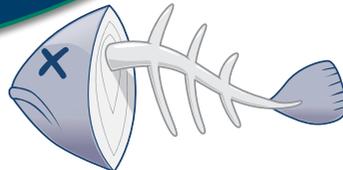


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Send us your
skeletons

and help ensure there are fish for the future



fish.wa.gov.au/frames

Further Information

The information in this guide is current at the time of printing, but may change. For the most up-to-date information about recreational fishing, check the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development website at fish.wa.gov.au/recfishing or contact the department.

Important disclaimer

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