



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Fisheries**

Fish for the future

Code of Conduct for Recreational Fishing in the Kimberley



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North Cable Beach. Photo: Kara Dew

Front cover: Ivanhoe Crossing, Kununurra. Photo: Tourism Western Australia.

Fishing in the Kimberley

For amazing fishing and wilderness experiences, Western Australia's vast, spectacular and remote Kimberley region is beyond compare. This region is the hottest and wettest part of Western Australia – fierce tropical cyclones, storm surges, flooding rain and enormous tidal changes combine to create dynamic yet productive aquatic habitats in this harsh and demanding environment.

The great variety of marine and freshwater species in the Kimberley presents a wealth of exciting fishing opportunities, including chasing mackerel, tuna, sailfish and red emperor in the ocean, battling with barramundi in the rivers and stalking king threadfin from shore and tarpon in freshwater creeks. Fishing is also often a popular activity as part of charter and cruise tours. But if we want to continue to enjoy these fantastic fishing experiences and this magical environment, then we need to make sure we take care of it by fishing responsibly.

The Kimberley marine region boasts an abundance of marine and freshwater species and some of the world's most unique coral reefs, seagrass meadows, mangrove forests and sponge gardens.



Talbot Bay. Photo: Shannon Conway

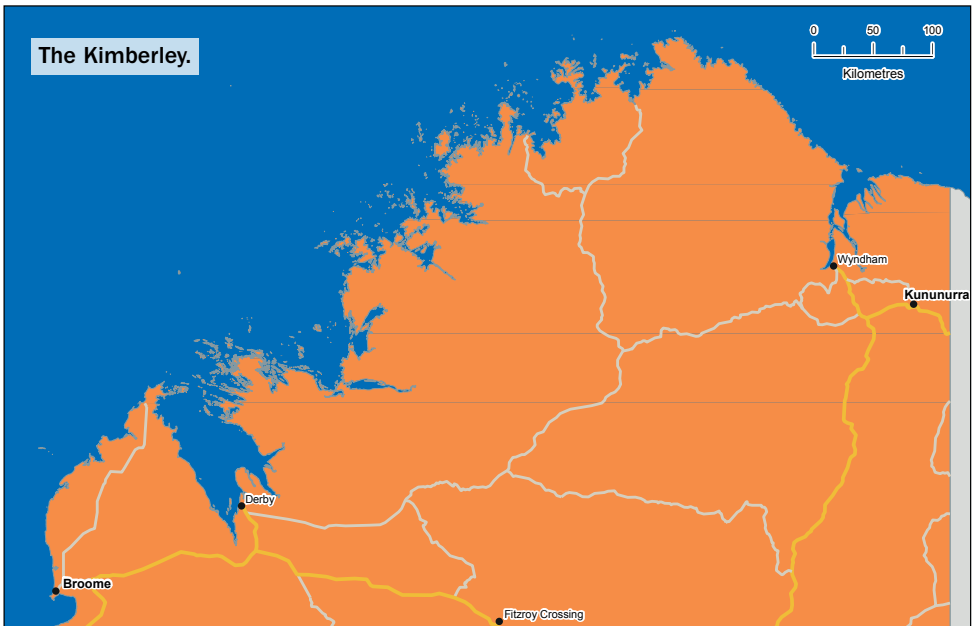
While the Kimberley is remote, more people are visiting or choosing to live here each year. This *Code of Conduct for Recreational Fishing in the Kimberley* has been developed to help sustain our precious fish resources and minimise the human footprint on this special place. Doing this in turn will enhance your wilderness fishing experience.

Remember, whenever you are in or near the water in the Kimberley, always be aware of crocodiles, sharks and stingers.

This code focuses on fishing best practice. It's both a philosophy for fishing and a practical way of ensuring there will be fish for future generations to catch.

As part of that goal, this guide tells you how to release fish in the healthiest condition possible – whether catching and releasing fish through choice or to keep within bag and size limits.

The code has been developed by the Department of Fisheries, working closely with Recfishwest, the Broome Fishing Club, Mary Island Fishing club and recreational fishers, as part of the State Government's *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy*.

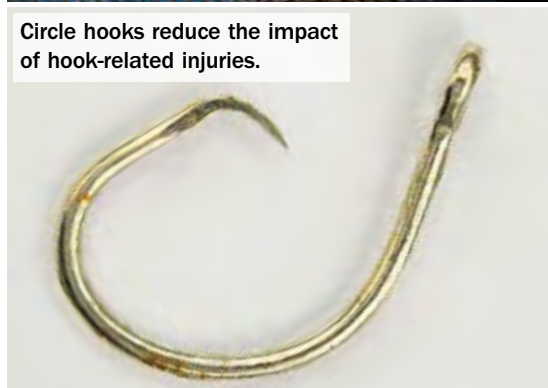


Code of Conduct for Recreational Fishing in the Kimberley

1. Use appropriate equipment – it's better for your catch

Using the right equipment for the species you are targeting decreases stress on the fish, increases their survival if released and produces a better eating quality for those you keep. We recommend you use the following gear to ensure fish are released in the healthiest condition possible:

- Barbless hooks on lures. Alternatively, crimp down the existing barbs. Barbless hooks cause less damage to fish than conventional barbed hooks and make for easier removal.
- Circle hooks when fishing with bait. Circle hooks are less likely to hook fish in the gills and more likely to hook them in the corner of the jaw. This increases both catch rates and post-release survival.
- Single hooks on lures. Avoid using treble hooks as they can cause major injuries to the fish.
- An appropriate line class to minimise stress on the fish. Using too light a line can increase the length of the fight, placing undue stress on fish.



- Biodegradable tackle products whenever possible. Leader and line that break down within five years are now available – better than the 600-plus years it takes for nylon line to biodegrade.
- Plain carbon-steel hooks. Unlike stainless steel alternatives, carbon-steel hooks corrode and don't remain in the environment for many years.
- Lead free sinkers. Steel and brass sinkers are good alternatives to environmentally unfriendly lead. Also timber floats are better to use than plastic ones.
- Fish-friendly, knotless landing nets. Sometimes referred to as *Environets*, knotless landing nets remove less slime from fish, increasing a fish's chance of survival when released. They are also less likely to cause damage to the fish's gills and fins.

Photo: Ben Little



Knotless landing nets reduce the removal of a fish's protective slime.

2. Handle fish correctly

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 fish are out of the water.
- Support the body of the fish; never hold a fish by its mouth or gills. Recent studies have shown significant damage can be done to fish when they are held by their gills or jaws.
- Keep fingers and hands clear of eyes and gills. Fish gills contain fragile blood vessels that are easily damaged by hands.
- Use wet hands, a wet cloth or a wet glove to handle fish. This will prevent the loss of protective slime from the scales. The slimy coating on fish protects them from infection and disease. Removing this coating can leave a fish susceptible to infection.
- Lay fish on a wet towel or brag mat. Never lay fish on the hot deck of a boat. Excess heat causes undue stress on the fish and affects body functions.
- When fishing, lift your fish clear of the side of your boat or walk to the water's edge to land it. Do not drag your caught fish over the ground or edge of your boat as it can irreparably damage the fish.



Fish should be supported along the length of their body.



Use a brag mat to keep fish off the hot deck of the boat.

3. Use appropriate techniques to release 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.

- Release fish as quickly as possible to minimise their stress. Using long-nosed pliers or dedicated hook extractors to remove hooks minimises damage to the fish and keeps your fingers safe from teeth and spines.
- If possible, release the fish while it is still in the water.
- Revive fatigued fish by gently supporting them in the water and moving them forward to allow water to flow over the gills. Increasing water flow over the gills assists the uptake of oxygen.

Allow water to flow over the gills when releasing fish.

Photo: Shannon Conway



- If the hook is deep within a fish's throat, cut the line as close to the mouth or eye of the hook as possible. Leaving the hook in place reduces damage to vital organs; the hook will eventually rust away.
- Set the camera up before the fish is taken from the water if you are planning to take a photo of your catch.
- Return all unwanted 'bycatch' in prime condition. Bycatch is the accidental capture of unwanted or non-targeted species.
- If you are fishing in deep water, use a release weight when releasing demersal species (living on or near the ocean floor). The release weight is a device which enables fish to be returned to the depth at which they were caught while minimising the effects of barotrauma – injury caused by the rapid expansion of gases in the fish's body.



A release weight.

The effect of barotrauma on this fish can be seen clearly. The fish is suffering from exophthalmia (eyes bulging from their sockets), caused by changes in water pressure as the fish is brought to the surface. Other indicators are a bloated stomach and inflated swim bladder.



4. Care for your catch

Fish being kept for consumption should be handled carefully.

- Dispatch your catch humanely with a quick spike to the brain or by slitting the gills and bending the head back to sever the spine.
- Store fish in an ice slurry. This will improve the eating quality of the flesh.
- Fillet fish away from the water. Don't fillet or dump scraps at the water's edge. Sharks and crocodiles may be attracted to the fish waste.
- Keep only what you plan to eat that day.

Fish in an ice slurry.



5. Protect the environment

Be aware of your impact on the environment when you're fishing, particularly in remote areas.

If you accidentally catch a protected species, return it to the water immediately.

Protected species found in the Kimberley which must be released include:

- sawfish;
- speartooth shark;
- whale shark;
- potato cod;
- humphead Maori wrasse;
- Queensland groper;
- female crabs with eggs; and
- coral and live rock.

Species such as sawfish are fully protected under Commonwealth and State legislation. Tagged sawfish should be reported to Murdoch University – fish@murdoch.edu.au.



Photo: David Morgan, Murdoch University

When you are fishing it is important to:

- Avoid trampling corals; reef walking damages the structure of coral reefs.
- Know your marine park zones; make sure you have the correct information before you go fishing.
- Avoid anchoring on reef systems; anchors account for a substantial amount of damage to coral reefs. Always place your anchor on a sandy bottom.
- Consider other fishers; slow down and don't get too close when passing in a vessel.
- Slow down if you see any large animals at the surface; turtles, sea snakes, dolphins, dugong and whales are all susceptible to being struck by boat hulls – often fatally.
- Watch out for tides; avoid getting caught by an outgoing tide and allowing your boat to become stuck in the mud during the heat of the day or overnight.



Noogoora burr is an introduced weed found throughout the Kimberley. You can help stop the spread of this noxious plant by checking for seeds that may be caught in your cast net.

- Check throw-nets and other items of gear or clothing for weeds such as Noogoora burr.
- Leave an area as you found it; take away all rubbish when you leave.
- Contain fires and ensure they are extinguished before leaving camp.

6. Contribute to research and education

Through a greater awareness and understanding of our fish stocks we can all contribute towards ensuring there will be 'fish for the future'. You can play your part by:

- Promoting sustainable fishing practices to your fellow fishers. Educating others about appropriate fishing behaviour is every fisher's responsibility.
- Assisting with Fisheries research projects that help us to gain a better understanding of how to ensure our fish stocks remain sustainable.



Education raises awareness of appropriate fishing behaviour.

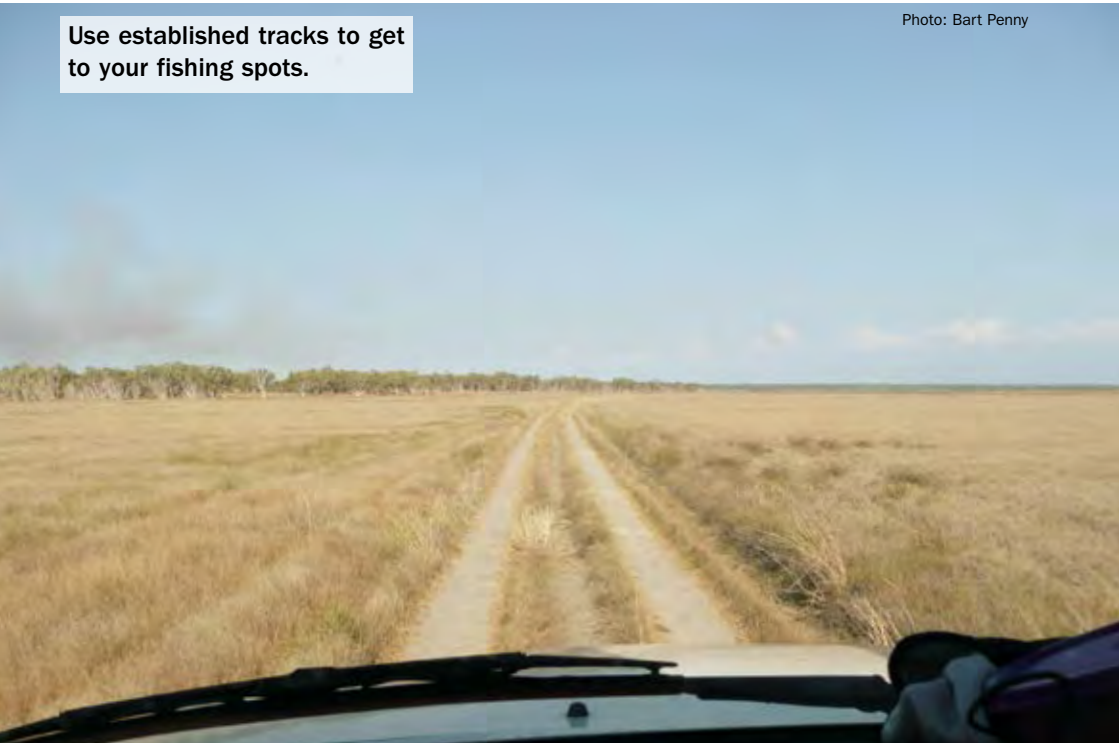
7. Access fishing spots appropriately

Not all fishing spots are in areas of general public access – some may only be accessible through private property or land that is culturally significant. Make sure you:

- Use established roads and tracks to get to your destination. Particularly avoid damaging dirt roads during the wet season.
- Obtain the landowner's permission before accessing fishing areas through pastoral leases.
- Leave gates as you found them.
- Don't damage or destroy fences.
- Avoid camping at stock-watering points.
- Seek permission before entering culturally important sites, including land recognised under Native Title.
- Avoid disturbing sites of cultural importance.

Use established tracks to get to your fishing spots.

Photo: Bart Penny



8. Abide by the recreational fishing rules

Recreational fishing rules and regulations are designed to help ensure our fisheries are sustainable. It's important to be aware of them before every fishing trip.

- Always have the relevant fishing licence with you.
- Observe all size and bag limits; always return a fish to the water if you're unsure what species it is or what size it needs to be.
- Undersize fish must be returned to the water; many smaller fish are juveniles of species to which rules apply.
- Respect other people's fishing gear.
- Respect other people's rights to fish (including commercial and Aboriginal fishers).
- Report illegal fishing activities to FishWatch.

For more information, visit www.fish.wa.gov.au

Photo: Kara Dew



Reports are most useful if they are accurate. Before you call, make a note of:

- HOW many people you saw
- WHO they were
- WHAT they were doing
- WHERE it happened
- WHEN it happened





Further information

Department of Fisheries Western Australia

www.fish.wa.gov.au

Recfishwest

www.recfishwest.org.au

Department of Environment and Conservation WA

www.dec.wa.gov.au

Kimberley Development Commission

www.kdc.wa.gov.au

Recfishing Research

www.recfishingresearch.org

Recfishing Research *Handle With Care* (2012)

recfishingresearch.org

Infofish Australia

www.info-fish.net

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