



This pamphlet provides guidelines on how to release fish that are unwanted or smaller than the minimum legal size.

Bag limits and size limits vary from area to area. If you are unsure about any aspect of the rules for recreational fishing in your area, ask at your tackle shop or the nearest Ministry for Primary Industries office for the free pamphlet on the recreational fishing laws of New Zealand.

Check the rules

Download our free fishing rules app from www.mpi.govt.nz.

Free text the name of the species you are fishing for to 9889 and you will receive the size and limit number by return text.

For more information on fishing rules go to www.mpi.govt.nz.



Contact the Ministry for Primary Industries offices

Kaitia (09) 408 6024	Opotiki (07) 315 5232	Petone (04) 576 8040
Whangarei (09) 470 0580	Gisborne (06) 869 0870	Nelson (03) 548 1069
Auckland (09) 820 1990	New Plymouth (06) 755 9311	Blenheim (03) 579 1088
Whitianga (07) 866 0549	Napier (06) 835 1065	Christchurch (03) 339 3662
Hamilton (07) 859 3126	Masterton (06) 370 3590	Dunedin (03) 474 0333
Tauranga (07) 571 2820	Head Office (04) 470 2600	Invercargill (03) 211 0060

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Fish handling guide

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New Zealand Government

Why handling fish correctly makes a difference

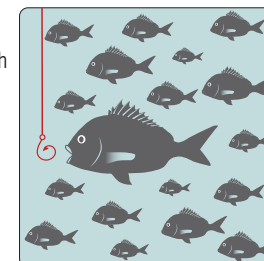
Correctly handling and releasing undersized fish increases their chances of surviving so that they reach a larger size.

Rough handling, especially with dry hands, damages the protective mucous layer covering the scales, reducing the chances of the fish surviving after release. The internal organs of the fish can be damaged by a fisher squeezing too hard, or by the impact of thrashing on hard surfaces.

Avoid catching undersized fish

The best way to protect small fish is not to catch them at all.

Use a larger hook and a bigger bait as these are less likely to be swallowed by small fish. Do not keep fishing in an area where most of the fish are small.

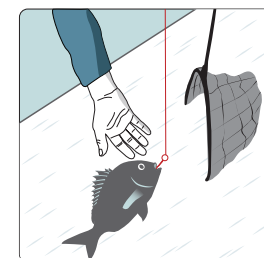


Keep fish in the water

Keeping fish in the water while removing the hook greatly reduces the stress caused by handling.

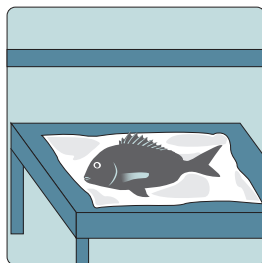
Minimise the time the fish is out of the water and always return fish back to the sea gently and from the lowest possible height.

If fish have to be removed from the water, this should be done as carefully as possible, especially if the hook is swallowed. Small fish can be safely lifted using the line if they are hooked in the mouth. Fish hooked in the gills or the gut should never be lifted by the line. Larger fish should be lifted using a knotless or rubberised net.



Put the fish on a soft wet surface

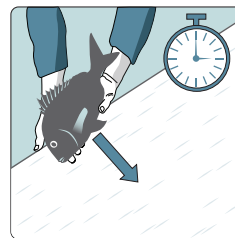
Wet your hands before handling and remember to be as gentle as possible. Placing the fish on a wet, soft surface such as a wet sponge or towel will help protect the mucous layer over the scales and most fish will struggle less. Avoid gripping the gill or gut area.



Returning fish to the water

Having removed the hook, return the fish to the water head first, as gently as you can from the least possible height.

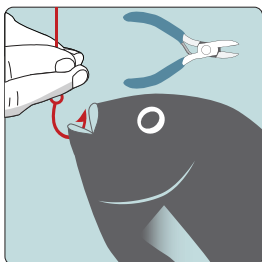
Minimise the time the fish is out of water to reduce stress or increase the chance of survival.



Getting the hook out

Remove the hook as gently as possible from fish that are hooked in the mouth or lip. Lie the fish on a wet, soft surface and use hook removers or long-nosed pliers to get a secure grip. Try to push the hook back the way it came and try not to tear the mouth.

Use barbless hooks to make releasing mouth-hooked fish easy.

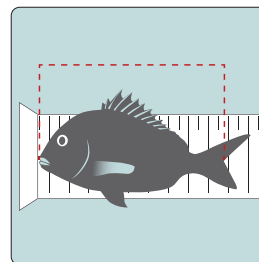


Measure your catch

There are large penalties for breaking the law. Limits are set at levels that allow fish to breed and help keep fisheries sustainable.

Size limits can vary from area to area.

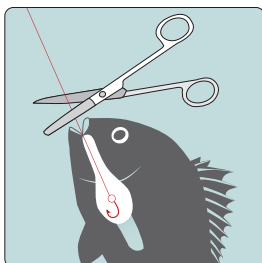
Increases in the numbers of fish, can be achieved in our main fisheries if people observe the minimum legal size limits and carefully return undersized fish to the water.



Cut the line for gut-hooked fish

If a fish has swallowed the hook, it is very likely to die if you try to remove it. Do not pull hard on the line. This is sure to cause internal damage. **Cut the line as close as you can to the mouth.**

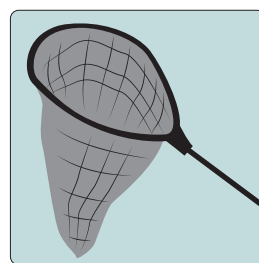
If you lose a hook in the process of releasing a fish that would otherwise die, consider this a small price to pay for the enjoyment you gain from fishing.



Landing nets

Use a knotless or rubberised landing net to land your fish as this type of net minimises the damage to fish scales and slime. Knotted landing nets can cause considerable delays in removing hooks, especially barbed hooks from the net and reduces fishing time.

Large fish can be strong, active and often difficult to control in a small boat. One way of controlling large fish is to leave the fish in the landing net while you remove the hook, then return it to the water. Alternatively, use a wet towel to hold the fish while the hook is removed.



REMEMBER TO DO THESE THINGS

- ✓ Remove fish from the water only if you have to
- ✓ Wear cotton or rubber gloves or at least wet your hands
- ✓ Lie fish on a soft wet surface if you need to handle them out of the water
- ✓ Change to a larger hook size if you are catching a lot of undersized fish
- ✓ Minimise the time fish are out of the water
- ✓ Remove the hook carefully from mouth-hooked fish
- ✓ Cut the line for gut-hooked fish
- ✓ Return fish gently to the sea

PLEASE DO NOT

- ✗ Hold fish by inserting your fingers inside the gill cover
- ✗ Poke or touch the eyes, and never hold fish by the eye sockets
- ✗ Squeeze the gill covers or gut area
- ✗ Lift fish by the tail as this can dislocate the spine
- ✗ Drop or place fish on a hot, dry deck or on rocks