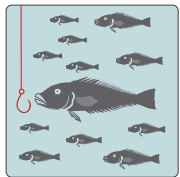
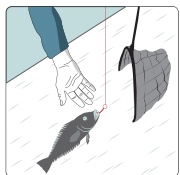


# Fish handling



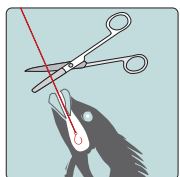
## Avoid catching undersized fish

The best way to protect small fish is to not catch them at all. Use a larger hook and a bigger bait as these are less likely to be swallowed by small fish. Move away from the area if you keep catching small fish.



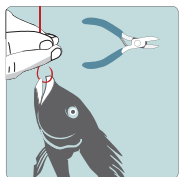
## Keep fish in the water

Keeping fish in the water while removing the hook greatly reduces stress to the fish. Fish hooked in the gills or gut should never be lifted by line. If you need to bring the fish on-board, use a knotless or rubber net. Make sure the fish is supported at all times.



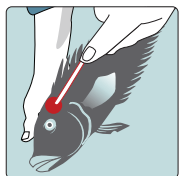
## Cut the line for gut-hooked fish

If a fish is gut-hooked always cut the line. It is likely to die if you try to remove it. Make the cut as close as possible to the mouth, and consider a lost hook a small price to pay for the enjoyment you gain from fishing.



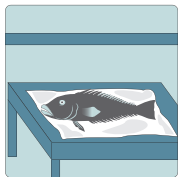
## Getting the hook out

Remove the hook gently from mouth-hooked fish. Try to push the hook back the way it came. If it is difficult to remove the hook by hand, use a pair of pliers to get a better grip.



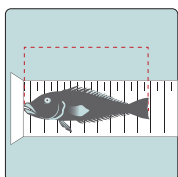
## Iki spike the fish before heading or gutting

To minimise stress to fish, iki spike the fish behind the eyes before processing it in any way. This also helps maintain the eating quality of your fish.



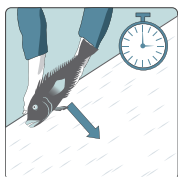
## Put fish on a smooth wet surface

Wet your hands before handling fish. Lay the fish down on a smooth wet surface and remember to be as gentle as possible. Avoid gripping the gill or gut area.



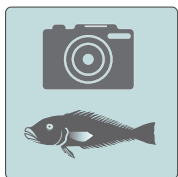
## Measure your catch

Measure the total length of your catch carefully as there are large penalties for breaking the law. Size limits help keep our fisheries sustainable.



## Return to the sea quickly and gently

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



## Photograph fish quickly

If you are taking photos before releasing make sure you don't hold fish under the gill cover. Lifting the fish by the tail can dislocate the spine and holding around the gut area can cause organ damage.

## Out of sight, out of mind

When you are returning an undersized blue cod, remember blue cod that are kept out of water for too long don't survive.

Handling needs to be kept to a minimum. Ensuring the fish is successfully returned to sea means it will continue to breed and support the local population.

## Remember to do these things

- ✓ Only remove fish from the water if you have to.
- ✓ Wear rubber gloves or at least wet your hands.
- ✓ Lie fish on a smooth wet surface if you need to handle them out of the water.
- ✓ Iki spike the fish before processing it in any way.
- ✓ Change to a larger hook size if you are catching a lot of undersized fish.
- ✓ Remove the hook carefully from mouth-hooked fish.
- ✓ Cut the line for gut-hooked fish.
- ✓ Return fish gently to the sea.

## Please do not...

- ✗ Poke or touch the eye, and never hold fish by the eye sockets.
- ✗ Drop or place fish on a hot, dry deck or on rocks.

## Key survival tips

To increase the likelihood of any undersize blue cod surviving when returned to the sea, you can do three key things:

- Use a larger hook to avoid catching undersized blue cod.
- Only remove fish from the water if you have to.
- Don't let seabirds see you return the fish.

### Avoiding small fish and sea birds

The best way to protect small fish is to use larger hooks and bigger bait which are less likely to be swallowed by smaller fish.

If you are catching small fish, move to a different area.

When returning small fish to the sea make sure there are no seabirds watching. Move to the opposite side of the boat and gently release the fish back to water.

Avoid attracting seabirds by:

- keeping decks clean and putting bait scraps and fish waste in covered bins;
- sinking bait and burley below six metres swiftly;
- using a return tube to return fish to the sea. In some areas (e.g. where mollymawks are prevalent) return tubes have been known to be effective.

### What is the right hook to use?

#### Do

- ✓ Keep your fishing lines tight and stay in touch with your gear.
- ✓ Use circle hooks with a flattened barb.
- ✓ Use 6/0 size hooks.

#### Avoid

- ✗ Hooks with barbs.
- ✗ Small, "beak" and "long shank" style hooks.

### Use the whole fish!

Don't let your fish go to waste! Cook with the whole fish.

# Fishing rules at your fingertips

New Zealand's fishing rules and restrictions change regularly. Check the rules each time you go fishing or gather seafood.

- ⑥ Download the **free NZ Fishing Rules app**. Scan the QR code or text 'app' to 9889. The app works when there's no phone coverage



- ⑥ Check the rules at **[fisheries.govt.nz/rules](https://fisheries.govt.nz/rules)**
- ⑥ Follow a regional **MPI Fisheries Facebook page** or email **[recreationalfisheries@mpi.govt.nz](mailto:recreationalfisheries@mpi.govt.nz)** for local updates
- ⑥ Freephone **0800 00 83 33** to find a local Fisheries New Zealand office

*Only take what you need for a feed.  
Protect our kaimoana for future generations.*



## Responsible Blue Cod Fishing Guidelines

