

A National Code of Practice for Recreational and Sport Fishing

An Initiative of Recfish Australia



Australian Government

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Recreational Fishing Community Grants Programme



Preamble

Australians love fishing. More than 3.5 million Australians fish annually for recreation and sport. This means about one in every five Australians enjoys fishing and half of all Australian households own fishing tackle. However, with the enjoyment of a natural resource comes responsibility for its sustainability and well being. This Code of Practice is intended for all those who fish recreationally, representatives of fishing bodies, the recreational fishing industry and fisheries communicators.

Recfish Australia was formed in 1983 to represent the interests of recreational and sport fishing at a national level. Recognition of the need for more sustainable fishing practices and an agreed national standard for recreational fishing led to the development of the first national code of practice (COP) in 1995. The COP underwent a minor review in 2001, and this document represents the first major review and revision of the Code since then.

The National Code of Practice is voluntary and has no formal legal status. We seek your support in promoting this code and applying its principles in all your fishing activities.

The Code in Summary

The National Code of Practice for Recreational and Sport Fishing addresses four main areas of fishing responsibility:

- Looking after our fisheries
- Treating fish humanely
- Protecting the environment
- Respecting the rights of others

The four overriding objectives form a framework of thirteen more specific principles. These principles are:

- ❑ **Taking no more than our immediate needs**
- ❑ **Supporting and encouraging activities that preserve, restore and enhance fisheries and fish habitat**
- ❑ **Understanding and observing all fishing regulations and reporting illegal fishing activities**
- ❑ **Preventing pollution and removing rubbish**
- ❑ **Using established roads and tracks**
- ❑ **Taking care when boating and anchoring to avoid damaging sensitive areas**
- ❑ **Reporting environmental damage and pollution to the relevant authorities**
- ❑ **Avoiding interactions with threatened species and their critical habitats**
- ❑ **Quickly and correctly returning unwanted or illegal catch to the water**
- ❑ **Using only legal tackle, attending all fishing gear and valuing our catch**
- ❑ **Practising courtesy towards all those who use inland and coastal waters**
- ❑ **Obtaining permission from landholders and traditional owners before entering land**
- ❑ **Caring for our own safety and the safety of others when fishing**

The Code in Detail

Each of the four main areas, and thirteen principles can be further detailed as follows:

Looking after our fisheries by:

1. TAKING NO MORE THAN OUR IMMEDIATE NEEDS

A vital way we can participate in conserving fish stocks is to limit our catch by taking only sufficient fish or other aquatic organisms for our own immediate needs.

Looking after our fisheries means:

- Using commonsense and restraint when fishing. For example, return unwanted fish to the water.
- Practising correct catch and release techniques, by observing the 'Gently does it' strategy for survival of released fish (www.info-fish.net/releasefish)
- Observing all bag limits for recreational fishing
- Carefully returning unwanted live bait to the waters it was taken from.

2. SUPPORTING AND ENCOURAGING ACTIVITIES THAT PRESERVE, RESTORE AND ENHANCE FISHERIES AND FISH HABITAT

We are all dependent on healthy ecosystems. Habitat destruction and modification resulting from human activities presents a continuing threat to the maintenance of fish stocks and the availability of other species such as shell fish, rock lobsters and crabs.

Preserving, restoring and enhancing fisheries and fish habitat means:

- Recognising the fragility and environmental diversity of streamside vegetation, seagrass, mangroves, and reefs
- Being aware of zoning in Marine Protected Areas
- Participating where possible in scientific, educational and community programs that benefit recreational fisheries and species
- Participating in the collection of recreational catch and effort statistics
- Participating in research, rehabilitation and monitoring programs such as Fishcare, Coastcare, Waterwatch, Rivercare, Landcare and fish tagging programs
- Educating others, especially children, in sustainable fishing practices
- Becoming familiar with the life cycles of fish and other aquatic fauna
- Keeping a safe distance from aquatic wildlife and avoiding undue noise when birds are roosting or nesting

- Never using non-native fish as live bait or introducing exotic fish into natural waters

3. UNDERSTANDING AND OBSERVING ALL FISHING REGULATIONS AND REPORTING ILLEGAL FISHING ACTIVITIES

State and Territory Fisheries Departments develop and enforce regulations to manage fisheries now and for the future. A responsible fishing community does not ignore illegal activities that threaten the fisheries and damage the reputation of law-abiding fishers.

Looking after our fisheries means:

- Being familiar with all regulations and observing them at all times
- Acquainting oneself with State and Territory bag, size and possession limits. (For current details of State or Territory bag, size and possession limits contact your State or Territory Fishing Agency)
- Becoming familiar with existing fishing tackle restrictions and checking the dates of local seasonal closures
- Helping to explain fishery regulations and the reasons for them to others, especially children
- Reporting black marketing of fish by recreational anglers
- Reporting poaching, theft and illegal netting to the relevant authorities
- Not presuming to act as officers of the law.

Treating fish humanely by:

4. QUICKLY AND CORRECTLY RETURNING UNWANTED OR ILLEGAL CATCH TO THE WATER

Responsible recreational fishers recognize and conform with the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) in all aspects of recreational fishing (www.daff.gov.au/animal-plant-health/welfare/aaws).

The practice of catch and release has increased greatly in recent years so correct handling and release of fish is essential to enhance overall survival rate of released fish. Incorrect handling damages fish and reduces their chances of survival after release. A fish out of water cannot live for more than three or four minutes. An exhausted fish played too long, may not recover.

Correctly returning fish means:

- Using 'fish-friendly' gear at every opportunity. This includes circle hooks, knotless landing nets and barbless hooks on lures
- Once hooked, landing fish as quickly as possible
- Using wet hands or cloths and a minimum of handling to maximise the chance of survival of all released fish
- Cutting the line when fish are deeply hooked
- Reviving tired fish by holding the fish gently and moving it forward to force water through its gills. When it has revived, and is able to swim normally, gently release it. (For more information go to <http://www.info-fish.net/releasefish/default.asp>)

5. USING ONLY APPROPRIATE, LEGAL TACKLE, ATTENDING GEAR AND VALUING THE CATCH

Good treatment and handling of fish is not just about maintaining table fish quality. It is also a mark of respect which fishers have for fish.

Treating fish humanely and avoiding waste means:

- Using only tackle that is appropriate for the size and species of fish being targeted
- Attending gear to avoid slack line and to ensure that fish are retrieved as soon as they are hooked
- Discouraging the use of gill nets by recreational fishers
- Dispatching retained fish immediately in a humane manner
- Icing fish down and storing them away from sunlight, preferably in a cooler or moist bag

Protecting the Environment by:

6. PREVENTING POLLUTION AND PROTECTING WILDLIFE BY REMOVING RUBBISH

Pollution affects the health of the environment and spoils our experience of the outdoors.

Preventing pollution means:

- Taking all rubbish away from fishing sites including: fishing line, hooks, plastic bags, bottles, six pack holders and all other packaging.
- Disposing of all items correctly to avoid potentially entrapping birds and other creatures
- Not leaving unused bait to foul rock platforms, river banks or beaches
- Not flushing rubbish, chemicals or other waste into stormwater systems, which lead to the sea.
- Participating in programs such as "Clean up Australia" and "Oceancare Day".

7. TAKING CARE WHEN BOATING AND ANCHORING TO AVOID DAMAGE TO WILDLIFE AND HABITAT

Boating increases the range of fishing possibilities but unskilled and thoughtless use of boats can lead to environmental damage.

Taking care when boating means:

- Showing care when anchoring, particularly around reef or seagrass areas
- Avoiding disturbance to wildlife by excessive noise or harassment
- Keeping a constant vigil when boating to avoid collisions with wildlife
- Refuelling on land wherever possible and not discharging wastes, oil or sewage into the water
- Taking care with your boating speed to minimise erosion of riverbanks from wave action
- Avoiding modification of or disturbance to fish habitat while diving.

8. USING ESTABLISHED ROADS AND TRACKS

Off-road driving can be a major contributor to erosion and vegetation loss as can trampling across dune systems, reef beds and other fragile areas.

Using established roads and tracks means:

- Using walking tracks
- Avoiding driving on beaches
- Avoiding straying from established roads and tracks
- Treating all natural areas as fragile

9. REPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE AND POLLUTION TO THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES

The protection of the environment is everyone's responsibility. By reporting pollution problems to the relevant authorities, we help ensure that our waters become pollutant free and discourage practices that destroy fish habitat.

Reporting environmental damage means:

- Reporting any fuel and oil spills
- Reporting all stranded or dead aquatic animals and protected species
- Reporting any signs of discharge of polluted waste waters and runoff including fertilisers, pesticides or other chemicals
- Reporting any vegetation or stream damage, e.g. sedimentation, declining water quality, algal blooms etc.
- Reporting sightings of suspected aquatic pest organisms such as Carp, Tilapia, *Salvinia* weed, *Caulerpa* weed, *Mimosa* weed.

10. AVOIDING INTERACTIONS WITH THREATENED SPECIES AND THEIR CRITICAL HABITAT

While fishing and accessing fishing grounds it is easy to inadvertently disturb the habitats of protected species or disturb the species themselves.

Avoiding interactions with threatened species means:

- Being aware of and avoiding disturbance to threatened species that inhabit areas you intend to fish
- Observing and obeying signage or guidelines in areas where threatened species live
- Complying with guidelines regarding activities in the vicinity of marine mammals
- Reporting any inappropriate behaviour which may affect threatened species
- Reporting sightings of threatened species in distress
- Quickly and carefully returning to the environment any inadvertently caught threatened species, eg seabirds.

Respecting the rights of others by:

11. PRACTISING COURTESY TOWARDS ALL THOSE WHO USE INLAND AND COASTAL WATERS

Lakes, creeks, rivers, and coasts are used for a variety of purposes. By recognising the rights of others to use the waters for their recreation and livelihood, recreational fishers help ensure that all are equally able to enjoy their activities.

Respecting the rights of others means:

- Being courteous to those whose communities we enter when fishing
- Realising that friendly rivalry can exist between recreational fishers without the need to dominate
- Preparing boats and trailers before launching at boat ramps to avoid delays and queues

12. OBTAINING PERMISSION FROM LANDHOLDERS AND TRADITIONAL OWNERS BEFORE ENTERING LAND

Having access to land held in trust by landholders and traditional owners is a privilege, not a right.

Respecting the rights of others means:

- Gaining permission before entering land and clearly indicating where you are going
- Recognising the cultural and spiritual attachment indigenous people have for their land and water
- Obtaining permission before lighting fires
- Avoiding any interference with land, stock or crops
- Leaving all gates as they were found
- Leaving the gun and dog at home to avoid harming or harassing livestock or wildlife.

13. CARING FOR OUR OWN SAFETY AND THE SAFETY OF OTHERS WHEN FISHING

Playing it safe while fishing is good commonsense. Never risk a life or injury while trying to catch a fish.

Caring about safety means:

- Being especially aware of the dangers of rock fishing and seeking local knowledge of tides and wave conditions
- Gaining local knowledge of common beach dangers including rips, currents, large waves, shore platforms, deep water, offshore reefs and tidal flows
- Always keeping an eye on the weather

- Keenly observing and understanding all boating regulations, including the carrying of the required safety equipment
- Keeping a safe distance from other boats, shore-based anglers, divers and swimmers
- Always notifying someone of your fishing destination and estimated time of return
- Exercising caution and planning when fishing inland waters and mountain lakes and streams. Submerged logs, sudden squalls, icy waters and extremely cold temperatures can create life-threatening situations.

The National Code of Practice for Recreational and Sport Fishing is an initiative of Recfish Australia. Funding for this Code of Practice review and revision is provided by the Australian Government through its Community Recreational Fishing Community Grants Programme. The views expressed in the Code are not necessarily those of the Australian Government and the Australian Government accepts no responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of the information or other material contained in the Code.

To find out more about the Code or to find out more about sustainable fishing practices contact Recfish Australia or contact any of Recfish Australia's member bodies (visit www.recfish.com.au).