

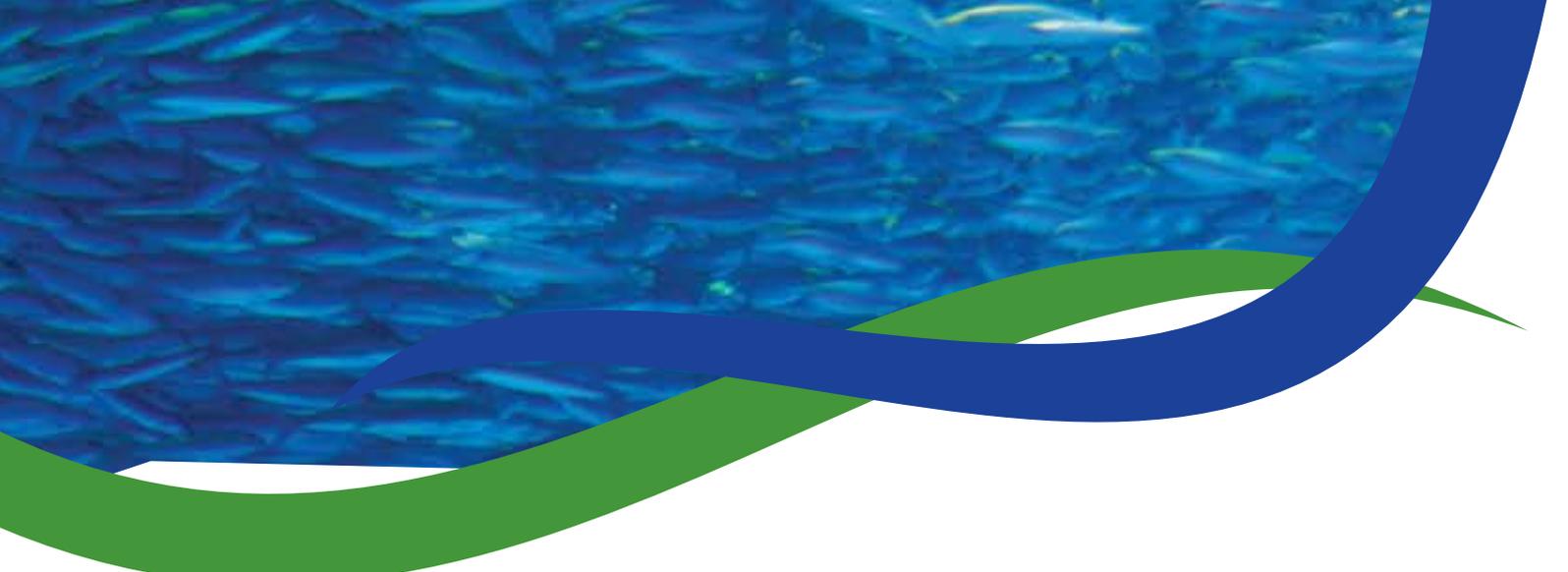


# A National Code of Practice *For Recreational & Sport Fishing*

An Initiative of Recfish Australia



**Australian Government**  
Department of Agriculture,  
Fisheries and Forestry



## A NATIONAL CODE OF PRACTICE FOR RECREATIONAL AND SPORT FISHING

Many Australians love fishing. More than 3.5 million Australians fish annually for recreation and sport. This means about one in every five Australians enjoy 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 National Code of Practice for Recreational and Sport Fishing is intended for all those who fish recreationally, representatives of recreational fishing organisations, the recreational fishing industry, the fishing media and fisheries communicators. It is an initiative of Recfish Australia and supported by the Australian Government.

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 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.*

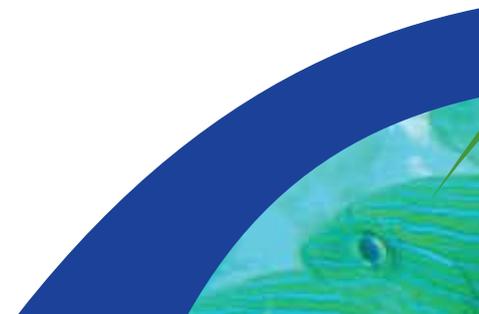
*The National Code is voluntary and has no formal legal status. We seek your support in promoting this Code and applying its principles in all your fishing activities.*

## THE CODE IN SUMMARY

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

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

The four overriding objectives form a framework incorporating fourteen more specific principles. These principles are:

- Quickly and correctly returning unwanted or illegal catch to the water
  - Quickly and humanely killing fish that are kept for consumption.
  - Using only appropriate, legal tackle, attending all fishing gear and valuing our catch
  - 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 protecting wildlife by removing rubbish
  - Taking care when boating and anchoring to avoid damage to wildlife and habitat
  - Using established roads and tracks
  - Reporting environmental damage
  - Avoiding unnecessary interactions with wildlife species and their habitats
  - 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
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# THE CODE IN DETAIL

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

## *Treating fish humanely by:*

### **1. QUICKLY AND CORRECTLY RETURNING UNWANTED OR ILLEGAL CATCH TO THE WATER**

This code recognises and conforms with the Overarching Principles of Aquatic Animal Welfare and the Position Statement of the National Consultative Committee on Animal Welfare (<http://www.daff.gov.au/animal-plant-health/welfare/nccaw/guidelines/fishing>)

A large proportion of fish caught throughout Australia must be released due to legal length regulations. Also, an increasing number of fish are now released due to the popularity of catch-and-release fishing. It is therefore responsible practice to ensure that all fish released have a good chance of survival. Studies have shown that most fish survive normal release practices, however, there are several techniques that will maximise the survival of released fish.

Quickly and correctly returning fish means:

- Using 'fish-friendly' gear whenever possible. This may include non-offset circle hooks, knotless landing nets and barbless hooks on lures
- Once hooked, minimising capture time, handling time and exposure to air to reduce stress on fish and increase their survival when released
- Not returning fish if excessive bleeding is noted
- Using wet hands, gloves or cloths and a minimum of handling (eg support fish by holding horizontally, cover fish's eyes)
- Cutting the line close to the mouth when fish are deeply hooked
- Reviving tired fish by holding the fish facing the current or gently 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 [www.info-fish.net/releasefish](http://www.info-fish.net/releasefish))

### **2. QUICKLY KILLING FISH THAT ARE KEPT FOR CONSUMPTION**

Quickly killing fish means:

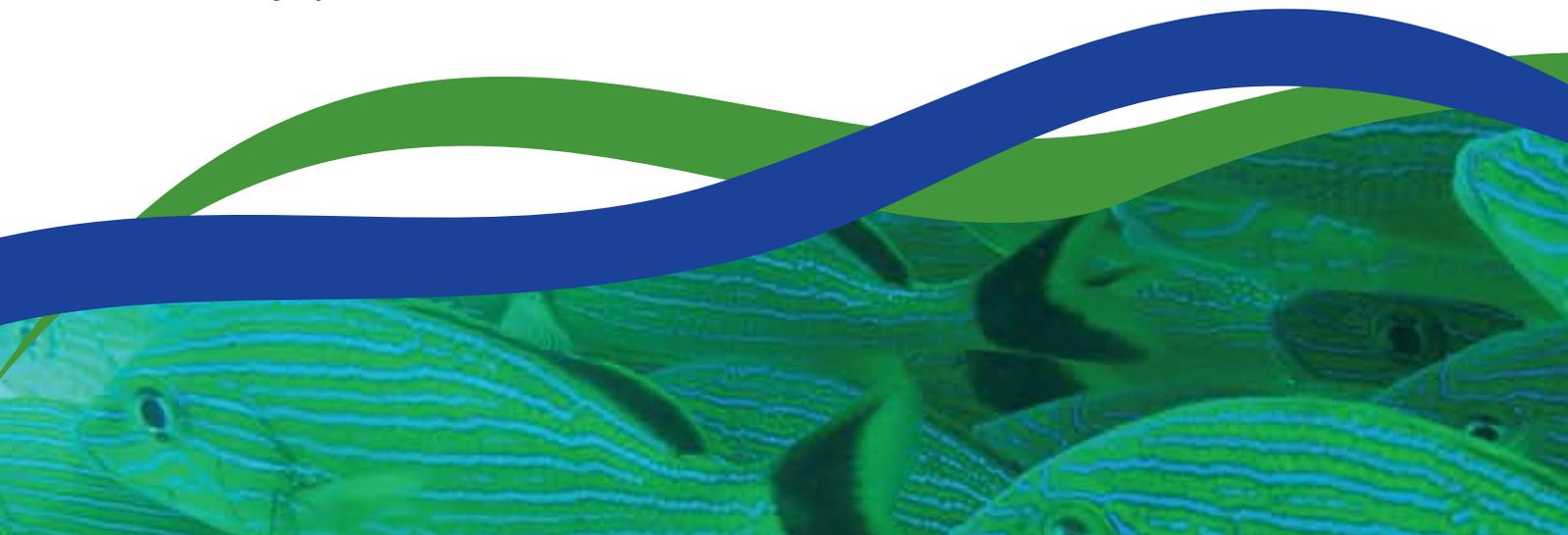
- Killing retained fish immediately in a humane manner
- Doing so by always initially administering an accurate, sharp blow to the head followed by bleeding out, pithing (spiking the brain) or decapitation.

### **3. USING ONLY APPROPRIATE, LEGAL TACKLE, ATTENDING GEAR AND VALUING THE CATCH**

Careful 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
- Carefully attending gear, avoiding slack line and watching for bites to ensure that fish are not deeply hooked and are retrieved as soon as they are hooked
- Discouraging the use of gill nets and set lines by recreational fishers
- Icing fish down and storing them away from sunlight, preferably in a cooler or moist bag
- Not discarding any retained fish



# Looking after our fisheries by:

## 4. 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:

- Avoiding waste
- Using commonsense and restraint when fishing. For example, carefully return unwanted catch 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](http://www.info-fish.net/releasefish))
- Observing all regulations such as bag and size limits for recreational fishing
- Avoiding the collection of excessive amounts of bait
- Carefully returning unwanted live bait, and only to the waters from which it was taken.

## 5. 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:

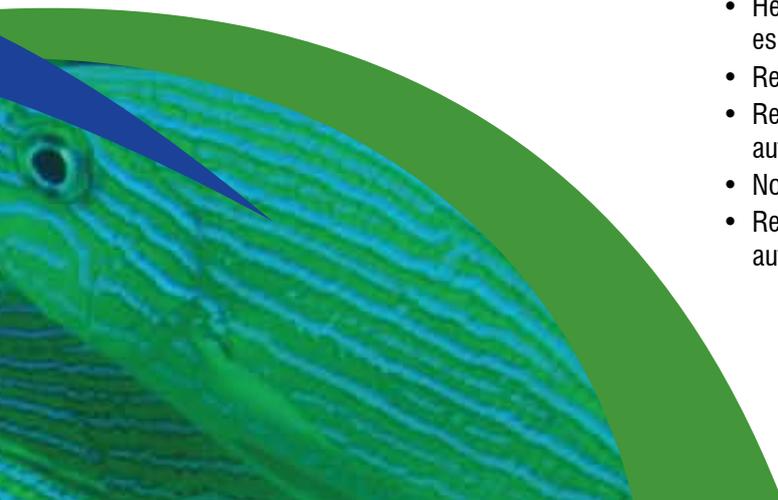
- Recognising the fragility and environmental diversity of streamside vegetation, seagrass, mangroves, and reefs
- Being aware of zoning in Marine Protected Areas
- Participating where possible in scientific, educational and community programs that benefit the sustainability of our fish resources
- Participating where possible in the collection of recreational catch and effort data
- Participating where possible 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 and humane fishing, handling and killing practices
- Becoming familiar with the life cycles of fish and other aquatic fauna
- Keeping a safe distance from aquatic wildlife, including birds, to minimise disturbance.
- Never using non-native fish as live bait or introducing fish from one catchment to another, especially exotic fish.

## 6. 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 relevant 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 Fisheries Agency)
- Becoming familiar with existing fishing tackle and gear restrictions and checking the dates of local seasonal closures
- Being in possession of a valid fishing licence where required
- Helping to explain fishery regulations and the reasons for them to others, especially children
- Reporting the selling or trading of fish by recreational anglers
- Reporting poaching, theft and all illegal fishing activities to the relevant authorities
- Not presuming to act as officers of the law
- Reporting inappropriate animal welfare behaviour to the appropriate authorities



# Protecting the environment by:

## 7. PREVENTING POLLUTION AND PROTECTING WILDLIFE BY REMOVING RUBBISH

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

Protecting the environment means:

- Taking all rubbish away from fishing sites including: discarded fishing line, hooks, plastic bags, bottles, six-pack holders and all other packaging.
- Disposing of all items correctly to avoid potential hazards to fauna
- Appropriately disposing of pest species such as Carp, Tilapia, Salvinia weed, Caulerpa weed, Mimosa weed
- Not leaving unused bait to foul rock platforms, river banks or beaches
- Not flushing rubbish, chemicals or other waste into stormwater systems.
- Participating where possible in environmental programs such as "Clean up Australia".

## 8. 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 boating and 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 and shorelines from wave action
- Avoiding modification of or disturbance to fish habitat while boating and fishing.

## 9. USING ESTABLISHED ROADS AND TRACKS

Off-road access can contribute to erosion and vegetation loss as can trampling across dune systems, reef beds and other fragile areas.

Using established roads and tracks means:

- Using designated/approved roads and walking tracks
- Only driving on beaches where it is permitted
- Avoiding straying from established roads and tracks
- Treating all natural areas as fragile

## 10. REPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

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

Reporting environmental damage means:

- Reporting any fuel or oil spills
- Reporting all fish kills
- Reporting all stranded or dead aquatic animals and protected species
- Reporting any signs of pollution or run-off that may impact on the aquatic environment
- Reporting any unusual vegetation or stream damage, e.g. algal blooms, habitat destruction etc.
- Reporting sightings of aquatic pest species such as Carp, Tilapia, Salvinia weed, Caulerpa weed, Mimosa weed.

## 11. AVOIDING UNNECESSARY INTERACTIONS WITH WILDLIFE SPECIES AND THEIR HABITATS

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

Avoiding interactions with wildlife species means:

- Being aware of and avoiding disturbance to protected or threatened species that inhabit areas you intend to fish
- Observing and obeying signage or guidelines regarding threatened species, marine mammals, birds etc
- 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:*

## **12. PRACTISING COURTESY TOWARDS ALL THOSE WHO USE INLAND AND COASTAL WATERS**

Our waterways 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 other users and those whose communities we enter when fishing
- Avoiding crowding other anglers
- Preparing boats and trailers before launching at boat ramps to avoid delays and queues
- Respecting commercial fishers' rights to fish legally

## **13. OBTAINING PERMISSION FROM LANDHOLDERS AND TRADITIONAL OWNERS BEFORE ENTERING THEIR 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 or waterways to fish and clearly indicating where you are going
- Recognising and respecting the cultural and spiritual attachment indigenous people have for their land and water
- Complying with all State and Territory fire regulations
- Avoiding any interference with farmland, stock or crops
- Leaving all gates as they were found
- Leaving guns and dogs at home to avoid harming or harassing livestock or wildlife.
- Always leaving an area as it was found

## **14. 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 and keeping up to date with weather forecasts
- 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
- Dressing appropriately when fishing (eg hats and rock-fishing footwear), and carrying appropriate provisions such as water
- 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.