



# NATIONAL RECREATIONAL FISHING CODE OF PRACTICE FOUNDATION DOCUMENT

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# INTRODUCTION

This document is intended as a “living document”, that can be reviewed and modified as new information and science about recreational fishing becomes available. The document is designed to present best practice principles that are relevant to all forms of recreational fishing. We note that there are specialised forms of recreational fishing, such as game fishing and spearfishing that have developed more detailed codes of practice that are suitable for these specific activities. Recreational fishers wishing to pursue these more specialised forms of recreational fishing are referred to these codes for more information (See attachment A).

This Foundation Document has been designed so that the themes and best practices it contains can be modified, simplified, tailored and communicated using partnership and communication strategies to reach all recreational fishers.

As we continually want to improve the National Code of Practice, your comments are always welcome and can be forwarded to [enquiries@recreationalfishing.com.au](mailto:enquiries@recreationalfishing.com.au).

## NATIONAL RECREATIONAL FISHING CODE OF PRACTICE



### Objective

*Empower recreational fishers to make responsible decisions in the pursuit of their passion.*



### Scope

This Foundation Document for the National Recreational Fishing Code of Practice applies to all recreational fishing pursuits, including those undertaken in freshwater, estuarine and marine environments.



### Themes

The Foundation Document for the Code of Practice and any communications products derived from it have an emphasis on “respect”, “responsibility” and sustainability. This emphasis and the key principles are reflected in the following themes:

- Fishing
- Interaction
- Stewardship
- Habitats



I will respect and appreciate the fish that I catch



I will respect other fishers and members of our community



I will demonstrate care for fish and the environment I fish in through my actions



I will respect, protect and restore our wildlife habitats

## Best Practice

Best practice behaviours of fishers promoted under the “Fishing” theme are:

- |                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| Fishing in General        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be a responsible recreational fisher. Take the time to learn about fishing gear so you make the right choices for each fishing situation, and never leave your gear unattended.</li> <li>• Respectful and ethical treatment of animals, including fish destined for release or consumption is everybody’s responsibility.</li> </ul>  |
| Fishing for Consumption   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dispatch a fish you wish to keep for food immediately with a firm blow on the head with a suitable blunt object or by pithing its brain with a sharp implement. Be prepared by having the tools ready. Look into the <i>iki jime</i> method, which results in the lowest levels of physiological stress to the fish and improves eating quality. (For more details check out <a href="http://www.ikijime.com">www.ikijime.com</a>).</li> <li>• Get the most from the fish that you take to eat. Ice fish down promptly after dispatch and store them away from sunlight in an esky, cooler or moist bag in order to maintain the highest possible eating quality and longest shelf life.</li> <li>• Always abide by all fishing rules and regulations including size and bag limits that require release of undersized, oversized or protected fish. Learn to release these fish properly by employing the same strategies used in catch and release fishing.</li> </ul>  |
| Catch and Release Fishing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be ready. Choose your fishing gear to maximise post-release survival and fish welfare. Use “fish-friendly” gear, including lures wherever possible, non-offset circle hooks when using bait, knotless landing nets and barbless hooks. Have de-hooking tools ready to use.</li> <li>• Be quick. Once hooked, minimise capture and handling time and exposure to air to increase fish survival when released. Ideally, keep fish in the water while de-hooking to maximise post–release survival. De-hook fish quickly and always cut the line near the hook if it cannot be easily removed.</li> <li>• Be gentle. If a fish needs to be removed from the water, use wet hands, properly support its weight at all times (no holding the fish vertically by the tail or jaw), avoid dry surfaces and minimise handling time to ensure that released fish will swim away strongly.</li> <li>• Be aware. Landing a fish can cause it to tire and the fish may need time to recover. Revive a tired fish by holding it upright facing the current or gently moving it forward (NOT backward) to force water through its gills. When it has revived, gently release it in an area away from predators.</li> <li>• Be prepared. Some demersal fish can suffer barotrauma (pressure damage) when brought too quickly to the surface, like a diver with the bends. Wherever possible avoid catch and release fishing in waters deeper than 10 meters, and if any fish that need to be released display signs of barotrauma, dehook and recompress them as quickly as possible using a release weight, or other similar descent release tool.</li> </ul> |



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## Best Practice

Best practice behaviours of fishers promoted under the “Interactions” theme are:

<b>Interactions with Others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be a considerate recreational fisher. Make preparation your priority and be aware of how your actions may be perceived by others.</li> <li>• Other people’s enjoyment is no less valuable than yours. Be courteous to other fishers and other non-fishing members of the community.</li> <li>• Waterways are for everybody to enjoy. Refrain from fishing in popular swimming areas when swimmers are present. Fillet fish away from the water and areas used by other people and dispose of fish frames and offal properly and thoughtfully – many boat ramps have designated fish cleaning areas and these should be used when available.</li> <li>• Commercial fishers are licensed and managed. Respect them and the role they play in feeding the non-fishing community.</li> </ul>
<b>Safe Fishing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety is everybody’s responsibility. Consider the safety benefits of good preparation, such as appropriate clothing and footwear, sunscreen, drinking water, and the weather forecast. Boaties should also carry all relevant safety gear.</li> <li>• Fishing can be exciting but it can also be dangerous. Seek and respect local knowledge of tide and wave conditions; offshore reefs and other hazards; and common beach dangers, including rips and currents. Also take heed of rock fishing forecasts that are available in some regions.</li> <li>• Never risk a life or injury while trying to catch a fish. Consider the risks of fishing alone. Always notify someone of your fishing destination and estimated time of return.</li> <li>• Remember we can all improve. Promote safety in fishing among your peers, especially in areas considered to be dangerous. If you are a beginner, ask an experienced fisher for advice.</li> </ul>
<b>Use of Boats</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boating can be relaxing but you still need to be vigilant. Keep a lookout at all times and maintain a safe distance from other boats, shore-based anglers, divers and swimmers.</li> </ul>
<b>Use of 4WD Vehicles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The natural environment is a place of peace and enjoyment for all. Respect other people’s enjoyment when driving off road.</li> <li>• The natural environment is home to many animals, big and small. Consider the possible consequences for wildlife and their habitats from driving off road. Only use established roads and tracks, only drive on beaches where it is permitted and treat all natural areas as fragile.</li> <li>• Driving in the natural environment is full of surprises. Consider the safety consequences of driving too fast. Slow down and enjoy the scenery.</li> </ul>
<b>Use of Radio Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Radio telecommunications are a vital safety tool. Respect its function and use it sparingly and responsibly.</li> </ul>

 <p><b>Fishing</b></p> <p>I will respect and appreciate the fish that I catch</p>	 <p><b>Interactions</b></p> <p>I will respect other fishers and members of our community</p>	 <p><b>Stewardship</b></p> <p>I will demonstrate care for fish and the environment I fish in through my actions</p>	 <p><b>Habitats</b></p> <p>I will respect, protect and restore our wildlife habitats</p>
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## Best Practice

Best practice behaviours of fishers promoted under the “Stewardship” theme are:

<b>Fish Abundance and Size</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be a thoughtful recreational fisher. Limit your catch; and release large breeding fish so there are more fish in the future. Take the time to learn about the different species.</li> <li>• Fishing laws are there for your benefit. Read and understand the rules in the area where you are fishing, including bag and size limits. Remember that the bag limit is the “most”, not the “must”.</li> <li>• Be aware. If you are catching many undersized fish, you might be in an area that is a nursery for fish and other aquatic wildlife. Be prepared to move on!</li> </ul>
<b>Citizen science</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make yourself an asset to scientists who are working to understand the fish you like to catch. Look into tagging programs and citizen science programs in your area and volunteer to participate.</li> <li>• Not everybody owns a boat. If you plan to use a charter fishing service, look for one that is certified for high fishing sustainability, environmental and safety standards.</li> <li>• When people do the wrong thing, they let everybody down. Report the selling or trading of fish by recreational fishers; and all illegal fishing activities to the relevant authorities.</li> </ul>
<b>Fishing tournaments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fishers should only support and participate in tournaments that seek to minimise impacts on fisheries resources and encourage best practice fishing methods. For more information on environmental standards for fishing tournaments, see <a href="http://www.neatfish.com">www.neatfish.com</a></li> </ul>
<b>Threatened, Endangered and Protected species</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn about Threatened, Endangered and Protected species (<a href="http://www.environment.gov.au/topics/threatened-species-ecological-communities">www.environment.gov.au/topics/threatened-species-ecological-communities</a>) so you know when you see one or if you catch one.</li> <li>• Be precautionary. If you catch a protected species or an unusual species that you do not recognise, release it immediately following the same procedures as you would for catch-and-release fishing. Boat ramps often have signage alerting anglers to telephone hotlines for reporting sightings and interactions with protected species. Take note of these numbers and make use of them if needed.</li> </ul>
<b>Large iconic aquatic wildlife</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large iconic aquatic wildlife, including turtles, whales, dugongs and other marine mammals, need to surface regularly to breathe. Take responsibility for the welfare of these animals by keeping alert at all times and slowing down to avoid boat strike.</li> </ul>
<b>Disturbance to other wildlife from fishing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeing our native wildlife is a feature of the recreational fishing experience. Take responsibility to enjoy the experience without disturbing wildlife by getting too close, creating excessive noise or allowing your fishing to adversely interact with the wildlife.</li> </ul>
<b>Controlling pest species</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreational fishers can also assist authorities in management and control of introduced or unwanted organisms by eradicating exotic/pest species like carp and tilapia.</li> </ul>



**Fishing**

I will respect and appreciate the fish that I catch



**Interactions**

I will respect other fishers and members of our community



**Stewardship**

I will demonstrate care for fish and the environment I fish in through my actions



**Habitats**

I will respect, protect and restore our wildlife habitats

## Best Practice

Best practice behaviours of fishers promoted under the “Habitats” theme are:

**Pollution from boats, cars and other vehicles**

- Be a caring recreational fisher. Maintain your vehicles and vessels and take responsibility for your own individual environmental footprint. Try to move to newer, lower emissions vehicles and outboards when you can to reduce your environmental impacts even further.
- Take pride in your approach to fishing. Dispose of all waste material, including discarded fishing tackle, plastic bags, bottles and other packaging appropriately in bins, or take it home and place in your rubbish bin, taking the responsible approach and extra effort to clean up rubbish left by others looking after our favourite fishing spots.
- The natural environment is at the core of the recreational fishing experience. Respect the beauty and function of the environment when you are fishing, including driving off road and when boating.

**Damage to habitat from fishing gear, including boats and anchors**

- Bottom substrates can form critical habitat for fish and other aquatic wildlife. Take responsibility for preserving these areas when boating and anchoring, particularly around coral and rocky reefs, shellfish reefs or seagrass areas.
- Vegetated banks, mangroves and saltmarshes are important buffer zones as well as breeding and refuge areas for many species. Take responsibility to minimise erosion of riverbanks and shorelines from wave action by abiding by go-slow zones.
- Discarded fishing gear can cause ongoing problems, including entangling wildlife and reducing amenity for other people in our community. Take responsibility to recover as much snagged fishing gear as possible and dispose of it appropriately.

**The need for information**

- Management of our aquatic ecosystems is constrained by limited monitoring. Consider the role that you can play by participating in existing citizen science programs dedicated to habitat, such as Redmap ([www.redmap.org.au](http://www.redmap.org.au)) and Eye on the Reef ([www.gbrmpa.gov.au/managing-the-reef/how-the-reefs-managed/eye-on-the-reef](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/managing-the-reef/how-the-reefs-managed/eye-on-the-reef)).

**Do your bit for habitat protection and restoration**

- Recreational fishing groups spend a lot of time, money and effort developing community-based programs that rehabilitate and restore critical fish habitats. These habitats play important roles in maintaining healthy fish stocks, ecosystem integrity and habitat connectivity.
- Providing clean, unpolluted water and protecting and restoring fish habitat are direct and practical ways to improve the welfare of fish and their populations by allowing them to live normally and naturally.
- Consider the role that you can play by supporting or participating in habitat protection and restoration programs such as Ozfish-Unlimited, Fishcare, Coastcare, Waterwatch, Rivercare and Landcare.

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# REFERENCES

Recfish Australia (2010). *A National Code of Practice for Recreational and Sport Fishing*. <http://recfishaustralia.org.au/national-code-of-practice-2010/>

Smith, A.K., Welch, D., Donnelly, R. and Kelley, R. (2015). *A review of the national recreational fishing code of practice*. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Adam\\_Smith25](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Adam_Smith25)

## ATTACHMENT A

### SPECIALISED FISHING CODES OF PRACTICE



#### Game Fishing Association Australia

Code of Practice for a responsible gamefish fishery

<http://www.gfaa.asn.au/new/index.php/gfaa-information/gfaa-principles-code-of-practice>



#### Australian Underwater Federation

Spearfishing Code of Conduct

<http://auf.com.au/sports/spearfishing/spearfishing-code-of-conduct/>



#### Underwater Skindivers and Fisherman's Association

Spearfishing Code of Conduct

<http://old-site.usfa.org.au/files/USFA%20Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf>

## MORE INFORMATION

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