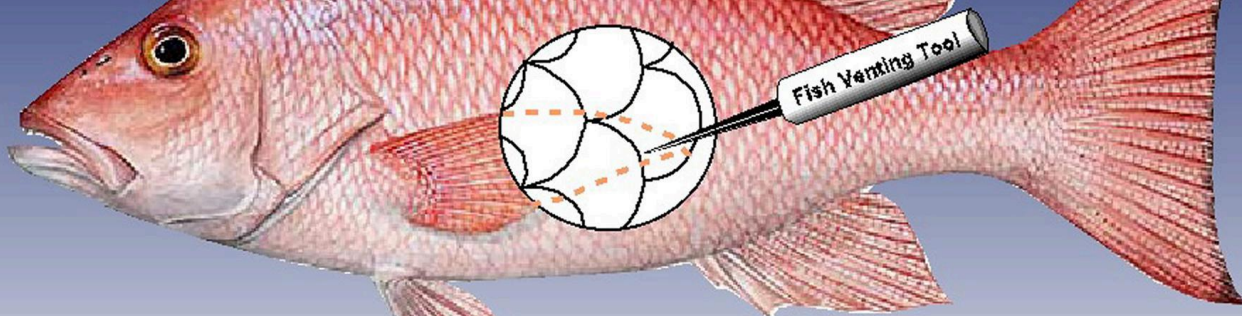


Fish Venting



1. Hold the fish gently but firmly on its side.
2. Point the tool 1 - 2 inches back from the base of the pectoral fin.
3. Insert the tool at a 45° angle (puncture only deep enough to release the gases).
4. Press gently on the fish abdomen to aid deflation, if necessary.
5. Remove the venting tool and return the fish to water.

Caution: Venting tool is very sharp. Use with care.

This graphic shows the proper place to insert a needle or hollow tool through the scales and rib cage area into the swim bladder of a red snapper, thus allowing gases to escape rapidly. This procedure will improve the fish's ability to return safely to deep waters. (Graphic provided by the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium)

Proper re-release steps improve survival rates

[Dr. James Marcus Drymon](#)

MSU Extension Service

BILOXI, Miss. -- Catch and release angling can be an effective conservation tool but only when it's done correctly.

Now that red snapper recreational fishing season is finally here, anglers will return some fish to the Gulf of Mexico, especially if they catch more than the daily limit of two per person. Steps to improve survival rates are important issues to consider when returning fish to the water.

First, use the correct gear. Successfully releasing a fish starts before you even cast your line.

Use circle hooks or barbless hooks to reduce gut hooking. Depending on the fish you're targeting, circle hooks may be required.

Use tackle strong enough to quickly land the fish you're targeting. Reducing fight time will help ensure the fish is strong enough to survive once released.

Use a knotless mesh or rubber landing net. These nets allow you to boat the fish without touching it, and they cause less damage to the eyes, fins, scales and protective coating (fish slime).

Remove the hook with a dehooker. When used correctly, dehookers minimize contact between the angler and the fish, and they reduce the amount of time the fish is out of the water.

With deep sea fishing, anglers should recognize barotrauma, the physical damage caused by changes in pressure. Barotrauma can happen to fish as well as scuba divers. For a fish, barotrauma occurs when it is hooked at depth and rapidly brought to the surface. As you reel in the fish, gas in its swim bladder quickly expands before it has the chance to naturally equilibrate, resulting in barotrauma. Barotrauma typically causes one of four injuries: a protruding stomach, bulging eyes, distended intestines or a bloated belly. You can reduce barotrauma issues by using a few simple techniques.

Ideally, the expanded gas in the swim bladder would be allowed to "recompress" naturally, which happens once the fish is returned to the depth where it was captured. This goal can be accomplished using a release cage or a descender device. Studies have confirmed that using these devices significantly increases survival of released fish, such as red snapper.

Alternatively, gas in the swim bladder can be released if the angler uses a venting tool. When performed properly, venting creates a small hole to release the expanded gas, allowing the fish to return to depth. Venting tools are inexpensive and available at most bait and tackle shops.

Research has advanced the practice of catch and release angling. By arming yourself with the proper gear, learning how to recognize barotrauma, and using descender devices or venting tools when appropriate, you can do your part to ensure the sustainability of Gulf of Mexico fish stocks for generations to come.

Editor's Note: Extension Outdoors is a column authored by several different experts in the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

Released: June 7, 2019

Contacts: [Dr. James Marcus Drymon](#)



Photos for publication (click for high resolution image):



This graphic shows the proper place to insert a needle or hollow tool through the scales and rib cage area into the swim bladder of a red snapper, thus allowing gases to escape rapidly. This procedure will improve the fish's ability to return safely to deep waters. (Graphic provided by the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium)