



## **SOUTH ATLANTIC SNAPPER/GROUPER ANGLERS: WE NEED YOUR FEEDBACK!**

**Why?** At some point all anglers will be faced with returning fish to the water they are either not allowed to keep – due to size, season, or creel limits – or because they are voluntarily practicing catch-and-release.

Every year, roughly 350 million saltwater fish are caught by recreational anglers in the South Atlantic, with 60% being returned to the water. Improving survival of these fish by even 1% could save 2-3 million fish annually! Although all fish are important, improving the survival of large spawners in particular can make a big difference to fishing over time. Implementing “Best Practices” for releasing fish is the right thing to do and will help ensure sound fisheries in the future.

*FishSmart* – a **program of the sportfishing industry, anglers, and fisheries managers** – and the Georgia DNR would like you to evaluate “Best Practices” for releasing fish and the use of descending devices for releasing deepwater fish such as snapper and grouper. Information used to refine FishSmart Best Practices will be based on **YOUR** on-the-water experiences using descending devices.

**We would like you to provide information about your experience using this device and feedback on best handling practices.**

Twice a year, we will contact you by email and ask you to complete a very brief survey, answering questions related to how frequently you use the device, number of fish that you release, whether you encountered any problems, or have any recommendations to improve, either the device or “Best Practices for Releasing Fish” brochure. We thank you for participating in this project. It’s through anglers such as you, and companies that care about fish & fishing, and the FishSmart program, that we can improve the future of sport fishing.

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*Funding or project support is provided by the following organizations. Use of any logo on this page does not constitute endorsement of any product.*



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## ***Best Practices*** for the Safe Release of your Fish

At some point all anglers will be faced with returning fish to the water that they are not allowed to keep – due to size, season, or creel limits – or simply practicing catch-and-release.

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**More than 350 million saltwater fish are caught each year in the South Atlantic with 60% being returned to the water. Improving survival of these fish by even 1% could save 2-3 million fish annually! In freshwater 84% of anglers voluntarily release fish that they could have kept.**

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Implementing “Best Practices” for releasing fish *is the right thing to do* and will help ensure sound fisheries in the future. Live release in many fisheries (freshwater bass and trout for example) has contributed to healthy and sustainable fishery resources.

## **Best Practices for Releasing Fish**

**Plan Ahead** - Expect to release fish on any given trip and prepare the equipment necessary to do so.

**Avoidance** - Develop skills to target the size and species you desire.

**Appropriate Gear** - Use gear suited to the size of fish that you are trying to catch. Use circle hooks where recommended and be aware that fishing techniques are different from “J” style hooks.

**Landing Fish** - Don’t play fish to exhaustion.

**Handling Fish** - Use knotless rubberized landing nets and rubberized gloves, to avoid removing the slime layer from their body.

- Keep the fish horizontal; support the body when lifting large fish.
- **DON’T DROP THE FISH** onto hard surfaces or from long distances!

**Releasing Fish** - If needed, use a release tool (dehookers, recompression tools) to minimize handling.

### **Time is of the essence!**

Release fish as soon as practical and do not keep them out of the water longer than necessary.

## **Deep Water Release**

Saltwater fish caught in deep water may be suffering from “barotrauma,” a buildup of swim bladder gases that makes it difficult for them to swim back down. Generally, fish caught deeper than 30 feet will suffer some effects. Follow these basic tips:

### **Assess condition while reeling in fish**

Signs of barotrauma include:

- Sluggish swimming.
- Eyes bulging (“pop eye”).
- Stomach protruding from mouth.
- Bloated midsection.

If the fish appears normal, release it without removing it from the water.

**Recompression** - Rapidly returning fish to depth is the method of choice for barotrauma affected fish. A variety of tools are on the market, including descender devices, release weights, baskets, etc.

**Return to Depth** - Return fish to the depth of capture. If catching fish at very deep depths, returning them as deep as possible may dramatically improve survival.

**Venting** - If rapid descent is not possible, venting is another option. Use established guidelines for venting such as those found at <http://catchandrelease.org>. **Note that the fish’s stomach may protrude from its mouth. Do NOT puncture the stomach.**