

Lower Zambezi

Catch & Release Initiative

GUIDELINES

Catch & Release

BASIC CATCH-AND-RELEASE GUIDELINES

Sport fishing is a great way to get outdoors and enjoy beautiful wilderness areas like the Lower Zambezi. Enjoying fishing depends on there being healthy populations of fish to catch. As responsible recreational anglers it is our responsibility to ensure that our activities do not damage either the environment in which we fish or the populations of fish on which our sport depends.

One way of minimizing the impact of sport fishing is to reduce fishing off-take by releasing rather than keeping the fish. Catch-and-release angling has been widely recognized as an environmentally friendly way of fishing and has been adopted around the world as a conservation measure for many protected areas. The key assumption of catch and release is that a captured fish will survive after being released. This is based on the observation that a fish might swim away apparently unharmed, but research suggests that fish mortality mostly occurs some time after release, as injuries or distress caused by catch and release only become apparent some time later.

It is important to understand that there will always be some mortality associated with catch and release fishing. A recent review found average mortality to be around 16 percent, but this figure varies and can be much higher for certain species. Despite these issues, catch-and-release, if practiced properly, can successfully minimize damage to fish and should be encouraged.

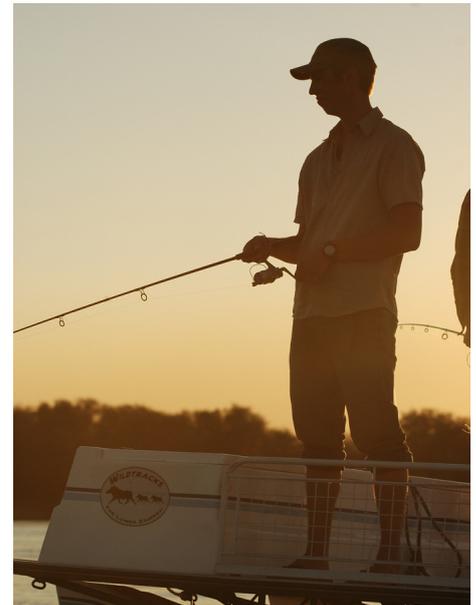
However it is not enough to simply throw back the fish that you don't want to keep. The survival of a fish depends largely on how it is treated all the way through from it first being hooked until it is released.

Follow the basic guidelines below to ensure the health and well-being of the fish you catch, and release:

- **Never play a fish to complete exhaustion.** It is important that the tackle used is strong enough to handle the potential size and power of your target species.
- **Keep fish in the water.** If possible unhook the fish without removing it from the water. Using barbless hooks make this easier
- **Avoid handling the fish.** If you must handle a fish, use wet hands to avoid damaging its protective mucous coating (a protective secretion that keeps fish healthy and free from infection).
- **Minimise airtime.** Even short exposure to the air can damage gill tissue. If you must remove a fish from the water return it as quickly as possible.
- **Use knotless landing nets.** Newer nets are made of a soft rubber mesh that is much less damaging to skin and mucous membrane
- **Exercise restraint.** Not all the fish you release will survive. Catch and release reduces but does not completely eliminate fish mortality. Overfishing a particular area will still deplete fish.
- **Fish responsibly.** Considering the welfare of every fish that you catch will ultimately benefit the fish population and fishery as a whole.

References:

The information in this document was compiled from information from the US Fish and Wildlife Service:
http://www.fws.gov/refuges/FishingGuide/catch_and_release.html



Did you know...

Good catch-and-release technique is essential to minimise stress and trauma to the fish and ensure a full recovery

Good catch-and-release does not require any specialised equipment or advanced training. Simple measures, attention to detail, and small making minor changes to the way you fish can make a difference.

Contact LZCRI to find out more about what you can do to safely release more of the fish you catch

Respect • Record • Release

For more information on how you can participate in fish conservation on the Lower Zambezi visit www.wildtracks-zambia.com/index.php/LZCRI

RELATED MATERIAL

GUIDELINES - Catch & Release
GUIDELINES - LZCRI Logbooks