What is FishCare - The school of best practice? FishCare is an educational programme to help recreational fishers reduce their impact on the marine environment, particularly inshore fish stocks.

LegaSea initiated FishCare because it is important that Kiwis help look after our fishery for future generations. Every user of the resource, whether we are customary, recreational or industrial fishers, has a stewardship responsibility. As individuals and collectively we don’t want to be pointing the finger at someone else if we’re not doing best practice ourselves.

FishCare is broken down into five core principles –

1. Fishing techniques.
2. Handling methods.
3. Utilisation.
4. Minimising fishing impacts on other creatures (e.g. whales, sea birds).
5. Safety at sea and while fishing.

The first principle, fishing techniques, is a simple look at the techniques we use while fishing. Changes to the methods we use can make a big difference to our impact on the fishery. What does this mean? There are numerous fish species that have size limits, snapper being a popular and obvious one. By using methods that avoid catching the undersized fish in the first place, fewer fish are handled and risk being harmed. So, this principle is about being highly selective in the methods we use so that we do our best to target the fish we want to keep.

The second principle focusses on handling and release techniques – what is the best way to handle and release a fish that we don’t want to keep? There is a hierarchy when it comes to handling fish. The optimum practice is no handling, to release fish while they are still in the water. If handling is required, use wet hands. Use of a cloth is not recommended as it removes the protective mucous layer on the fish’s skin.

Utilisation – from kill and chill, to using as much of the fish as possible. For the ‘fillets only’ fishers, there is are lots of ways to make sure the heads and frames aren’t wasted: from fish stocks to smoking, to giving away the rest to people in your community via FreeFishHeads.co.nz.

Minimising your impact on other sea creatures is a part of fishing that can’t be ignored. Sea birds, mammals, and the whole ecosystem can be impacted by what we do. Learning how to safely deter sea birds and eliminating plastics from entering the marine environment or simply retrieving stray plastic to prevent other creatures from ingesting rubbish all contributes to FishCare.

Safety is the fifth principle. While most of the earlier principles deal with safety of the fish and other creatures, safety for the fisher can’t be overlooked. Living to fish another day is the ultimate goal and preparation is the biggest element of minimising harm and avoiding tragedy while on the water for the boat and land based fisher.

For more advice and tips, check out our website: [www.fishcare.co.nz](http://www.fishcare.co.nz/)