Utilisation is Conservation

What is best practice when it comes to utilising our fish? How the fish is despatched and stored when it first comes aboard is very important. Not only does it make a difference to the eating qualities, it also says much about our level of respect for the fish and our marine environment.

Some species like kahawai and skipjack tuna have large quantities of blood in the flesh. Bleeding the fish beforehand can help reduce the amount of blood in the flesh and improve their eating qualities.

Learning to effectively kill the fish we wish to eat is important. The Japanese developed the ‘iki’ technique of spiking the hind brain of fish to quickly and humanely kill the fish. A dedicated metal spike is generally used or the sharp point of a knife can also be effective. The difficult part can be locating the brain. Here is a useful resource for learning where to spike fish: <http://www.ikijime.com/>

Once the fish has been killed, chilling the fish is the next important step. Many fishers will take a bag of salt ice with them and make a slurry of sea water in their chilly bin whilst fishing. A thick ice slurry can bring the flesh down to below freezing temperature and start to freeze the flesh. A better approach is to make a thin ice slurry of one part ice to two parts salt ice (2:1) that covers the fish. Cooling the fish quickly to somewhere between 2-10 degrees is ideal. After 15 minutes in the ice slurry, removing and storing on ice in a separate container or in a refrigerator retains the best eating qualities.

If this isn’t process isn’t possible, retaining the fish in a thin ice slurry throughout the day will also keep the fish in top condition. Add ice when necessary to keep the slurry consistently thin.

Fish that are chilled overnight are easier to fillet, maintaining the slurry over several days is also fine, especially if more time is required to process the catch appropriately. Always plan in time to process your catch as part of your fishing trip so no fish are wasted due to time constraints. Wasting or dumping fish because of bad planning is unacceptable. Don’t kill more fish than you can utilise.

Many people fillet their catch and then discard the rest of the fish (head, frame, offal). This may represent up to 70% of the fish being wasted. Utilising the whole fish is the best conservation practice as it means we make the most of our natural resources.

There are numerous ways to utilise the whole fish. Removing the offal and gills before splitting and smoking is an easy way to use as much flesh as possible. Steaming the fish frame and head can help produce delicious stock for soups and chowders and help retain much of the flesh on the fish.

If you have surplus heads and frames, there will most likely be a number of people your community who would gladly collect and use them. How do you easily find these grateful members of your community? It’s a fairly easy exercise because a website and app has been developed to connect people who have fish with those who would like them, just go to [www.freefishheads.co.nz](http://www.freefishheads.co.nz) .