



BILLFISH GUIDE

Billfish, including species like marlin, sailfish, and swordfish, are among the ocean's most majestic and powerful creatures. They capture the hearts of sport fishers around the globe. With growing awareness of their conservation needs and the role anglers play in their sustainability, best practices for catching and handling these fish are more important than ever.

PREPARATION FOR FISHING

Gear Check: Ensure all fishing and safety equipment is in top condition before heading out. This includes rods, reels, lines, and hooks tailored to the size of the billfish you're targeting.

Communication and Safety: Always have at least two forms of waterproof communication and know how to use them. Fishing in pairs or within range of other vessels is safer and more effective.

Weather and Navigation: Check the latest forecasts and prepare for changes. Know your route and have contingency plans.

Preservation Supplies: If you decide to retain a fish, bring ample salt ice or a proper cooling system to maintain the quality of the catch.

FISHING TACTICS

Appropriate Tackle: Use a heavy tackle that is sufficient to handle a billfish, reducing the fight time and stress on the fish.

Hook Selection: Use non-offset circle hooks for live or natural baits to facilitate easier hook removal and reduce fish injury.

Catch Limits: Respect local regulations and consider adopting a personal or boat limit to help conserve billfish populations.



HANDLING RETAINED FISH

Humane Dispatch: If retaining a billfish, immediately dispatch the fish by administering a few solid blows to the top of the head.

Bleeding: To preserve meat quality, bleed the fish immediately after dispatch by cutting near the heart.

Measurement and Cooling: Measure the fish if required; Billfish are not endothermic like most tuna species so their body stays pretty much at ambient water temperature. Gutting with ice in the cavity is not needed if they are coming back to port the same day.

Estimating Weight: If you don't weigh the fish immediately, use the formula (Length (cm) x Girth² (cm) divided by the species-specific factor) to estimate its weight.

HANDLING RELEASED FISH

Water Release: Always aim to release billfish without removing them from the water to minimise stress and physical damage.

Keep Moving: If safe to do so, keep the vessel moving slowly forward, keeping the mouth in the water to aid the oxygenation of the fish's gills.

Tagging: If tagging the fish, ensure tags are placed correctly and securely without causing excessive harm.

Hook Removal: If the hook cannot be easily reached, remove it with a de-hooker or cut the line as close to the mouth as possible.

RESPECT AND PROTECTION FOR OTHER MARINE LIFE

Debris: Never throw plastic or other trash overboard.

Avoid Disturbances: Keep distance from sharks, seals, and other marine creatures to avoid accidental harm or behavioural changes.



SAFETY AND ETHICS

Emergency Preparedness: Carry and know how to use an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB).

Extra Supplies: Take additional fuel and store it safely.

Cooperation: Fish near other boats when possible and be ready to assist others in need.

Avoid Conflict: Stay clear of commercial fishing operations and gear to prevent entanglements.

Conservation Support: Join conservation efforts. Join a club and report your catch to them or online at fishcatch.co.nz.

ENJOYMENT AND CONSERVATION

Being offshore with the creatures large and small that you encounter is special. Anglers have had an important role in lobbying for conservative management of a range of HMS species. These would be out of sight and mind if we did not go and look and care. By adopting these best practices, anglers can enjoy the thrill of the chase and fight while ensuring that these magnificent fish continue to thrive in our oceans. Always aim for a sustainable approach to sport fishing by respecting the creatures and the sea they inhabit. Enjoy every moment on the water and prioritise getting home safely.

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