

Hook, Line and Sink 'Em

Floaterers are not a pretty sight. Will a fish you release need help getting back down? Here's a look at types of descending gear that may make the job easier.

Experienced deep-sea anglers are all too familiar with the problem of trying to release fish caught in deep water that must get thrown back because they're undersized or out of season.

These fish often undergo expansion of gases in the swim bladder as they are brought to the surface. What can result is a ruptured swim bladder and other physical damage to the fish, a condition called barotrauma.

Signs of barotrauma include protrusion of the stomach from the fish's mouth, bulging eyes, bloated belly, and distended intestines.

Recent snapper and grouper closures in the Gulf have focused attention on the importance of successful release and survival of fish when signs of barotrauma are present. New gear is in use today that may provide effective options for releasing fish in deeper water, and trials are underway with recreational anglers to evaluate the practical use of various types of descending devices.

Both venting and descending devices should only be used on fish that cannot swim back down on their own. Otherwise, the increased handling and time out of the water will probably do more harm than good.



Pressurized release tools can be set at varying depths.



Weighted crates allow release of several fish at once.



Spring release tools open on the bottom.

Venting's role

Gulf anglers now have the option of using fishing descending gear, venting tools or a combination of both to release fish suffering from barotrauma.

Venting involves using a sharp hollow instrument to puncture the fish body cavity wall about 1 to 2 inches from the base of the pectoral fin to release expanded swim bladder gases. Venting can increase the survival of some, but not all fish species, and obviously results in some additional injury to the fish. Knives and ice picks are not suitable, but a number of proper venting tools are available on the market today.

Visit catchandrelease.org
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