



# RETURN 'EM RIGHT

## Earn Another Fight

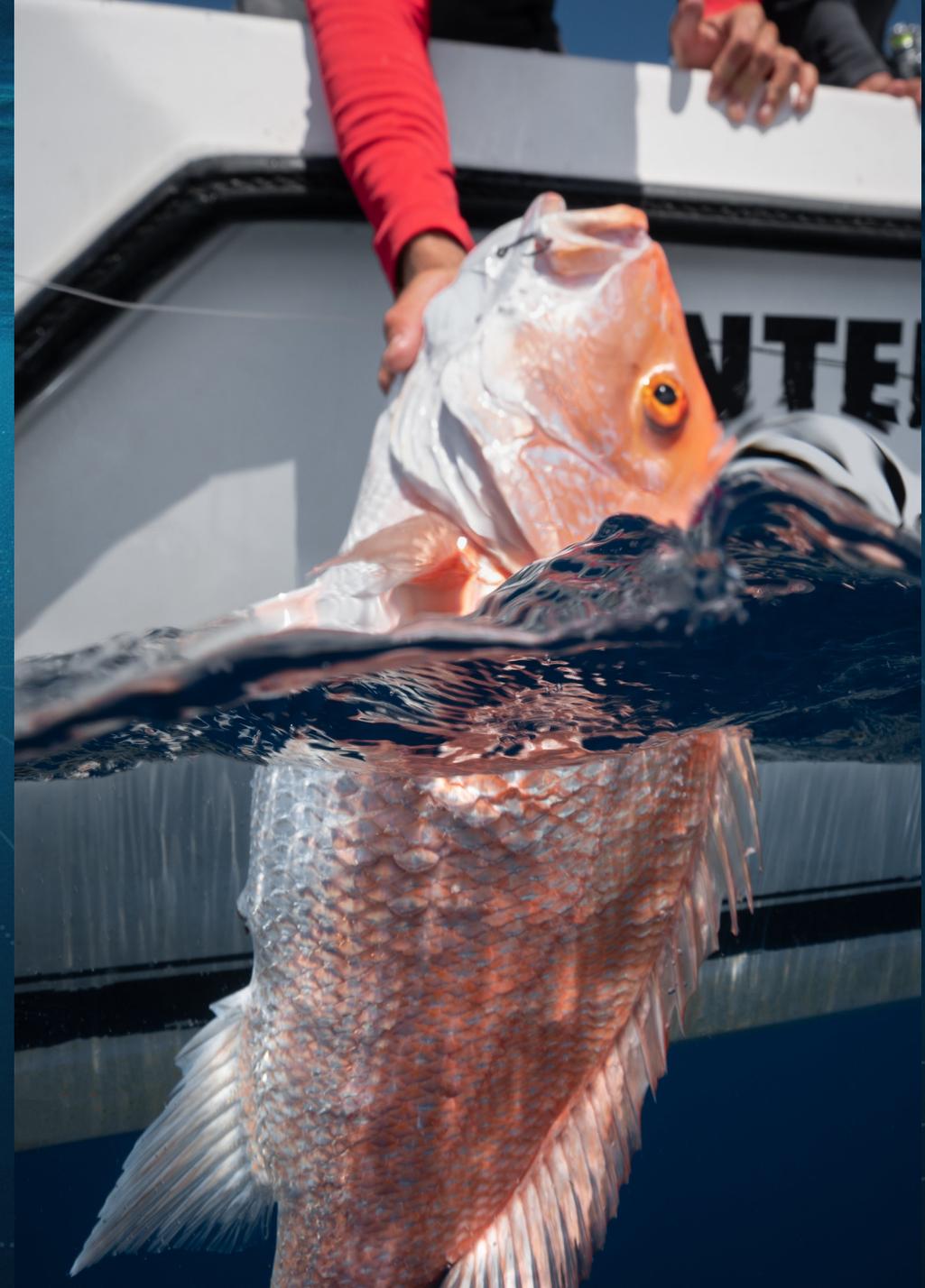
NICK HADDAD  
SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER  
FLORIDA SEA GRANT  
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**RETURN 'EM  
RIGHT**

# Return 'Em Right

- Duration: 7 years
- Funding: Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill
- Component
  - Education & outreach
  - Fish descending device (FDD) distribution
  - Research & monitoring
- Goals
  - Reduce mortality in reef fish resulting from barotrauma and release
  - Improve angler experiences with release gear
  - Improve the overall health of reef fisheries



# Project Plan

- Build an independently branded program that resonates with anglers
  - Guided by anglers, grounded in science
  - Promote best release practices
- Gear distribution
  - Education is prerequisite for gear
  - DESCEND Act
- Phase out distribution by sector
  - Phase 1: Federal for-hire reef fish permit owners, captains and crew
  - Phase 2: All Gulf of Mexico reef fish anglers



# What's been accomplished?

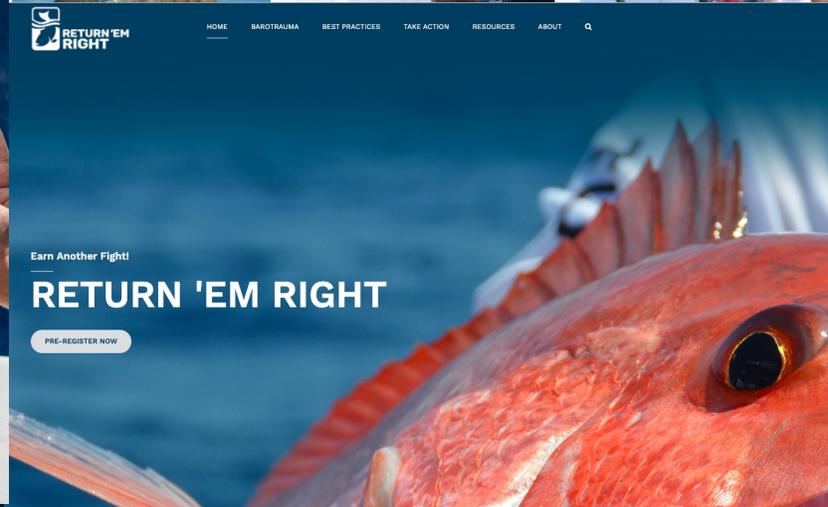
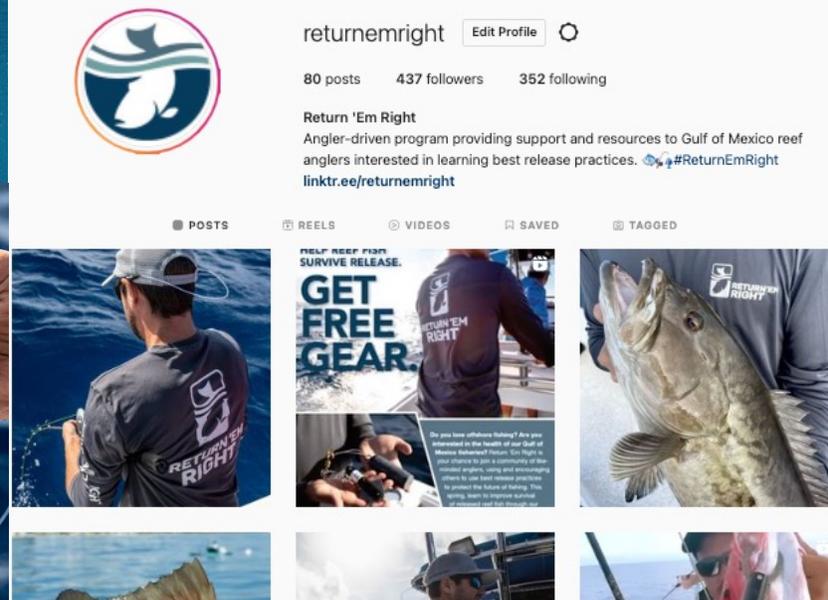
- Branding
- Device procurement
- Digital media
  - Web: [returnemright.org](http://returnemright.org)
  - Social: @ReturnEmRight
- Education module
  - Focused on situational awareness
  - Emphasis on barotrauma mitigation
- Phase 1 & 2 launch
  - Publicize program
  - Gear distribution



A composite image showing the branding and digital presence of Return 'Em Right. At the top left, a diagram shows the logo components: 1) The Logomark (a stylized fish and waves) and 2) The Logotype (the text 'RETURN 'EM RIGHT'). To the right, text explains the logomark and logotype. Below this is a screenshot of the organization's Instagram profile, showing the profile picture, name 'returnemright', and a grid of posts. At the bottom is a screenshot of the organization's website, featuring a navigation menu and a prominent 'RETURN 'EM RIGHT' header with a 'PRE-REGISTER NOW' button. A large image of a red snapper is visible in the bottom right corner of the website screenshot.

**1) The Logomark**  
The logomark features a symbolic representation of a reef fish species descending through the water column as it returns to its proper depth.

**2) The Logotype**  
The treatment of the brand name within the logo visually emphasizes the word RIGHT to reinforce that there are correct and incorrect ways to release reef species.



# Phase 1 Launch Recap

- Publicized program – Sept 14, 2021
  - Social posts reached 26,000 people
  - Pre-registered list over 3200 anglers
- Launched education module to federal for-hire captains and crew – Oct 15, 2021
  - 155 federally permitted captains and crew received training and gear
  - Paused outreach efforts to focus on educational module improvements

## CALL TO ACTION



Blair Wickstrom  
PUBLISHER

## Return 'Em Right

GULF REEF FISH ANGLERS: SIGN UP FOR PROGRAM, FREE DESCENDER KIT

On the heels of Keep 'Em Wet, comes Return 'Em Right. These aren't just do-gooder hash tags, but practices that will both help restore fish stocks, and soon, help keep you from running afoul of the law. "Return 'Em Right is an upcoming program that will be the leading voice for tackling barotrauma in the Gulf of Mexico," said program Communications Manager Nick Haddad.

Haddad said the program's goals are to reduce mortality in reef fish resulting from barotrauma and release, improve anglers' experiences with release gear and to increase the overall health of reef fisheries.

Haddad's employer, Florida Sea Grant, is working with partners at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Restoration Center (NOAA RC) and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) to provide anglers the knowledge and tools to successfully release fish suffering from barotrauma in the Gulf of Mexico.

This program is independent of the DESCEND Act of 2020, which made it unlawful to fish, commercially or recreationally, for reef fish in the Gulf of Mexico without a device to safely return discarded fish to the water at a depth sufficient for the fish to recover from barotrauma. It appears NOAA is expected to begin enforcement of the DESCEND Act on or before January 2022. (Separately, NOAA implemented a descender requirement for reef fishing in Atlantic federal waters in July 2020.)



Pressure release clips in this descending device open and allow the fish to swim away upon reaching the desired depth.

## CTA

### WHAT CAN YOU DO NOW?

Sign up/register to get added to a list to participate in the program. Gulf of Mexico fishermen only. You'll be asked to watch a short video and will be sent release gear so you can Return 'Em Right on your next trip.

Contact Nick Haddad  
352-327-1750  
n.haddad@ufl.edu  
tinyurl.com/ReturnEmRight



Photo by Adrian Gray

Reef fish, like snapper and grouper, caught from depths of 50 feet or more are vulnerable to barotrauma, a phenomenon which causes the swim bladder and eye sockets to expand after a rapid rise to the surface. When this happens, the fish's stomach can protrude from its mouth and its body cavity becomes bloated acting as a balloon and making the fish float. The result is a high mortality rate for fish that are released.

Unless that pressure is relieved, the fish cannot return to the reef. Anglers can remedy this by using a descending device—a weighted hook, lip clamp, or box that will hold the fish while it is lowered to a sufficient depth to recover from the effects of barotrauma. This device can be anything as simple as a weighted milk crate on a rope to something more sophisticated, like the SeaQualizer, which has pressure-release clips that allow fish to swim away upon reaching the desired depth.

The Return 'Em Right project was selected and funded by the Deep-water Horizon Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group to benefit Gulf of Mexico reef fish fisheries impacted by the 2010 oil spill. The seven-year, \$30 million effort should go a long way in preserving a future for bottom fishing anglers, and snappers and groupers, for years to come.

"The program looks to work directly with Gulf of Mexico federally permitted captains and crew in fall of 2021, followed by private recreational reef anglers in spring of 2022," said Haddad. This program provides an opportunity for anglers to learn more about the importance of best release practices, while providing the necessary tools to anglers at no cost.

Again, Return 'Em Right is independent from the DESCEND Act and is not a result of legislative changes, but the free gear provided through it will keep you fishing legally once the enforcement of the new law begins. Plus, adopting best handling and release practices, like the Keep 'Em Wet campaign, provides a benefit to the immediate fishery, the future of the fishery and the ecosystem as a whole.

Haddad emphasized, "It is our responsibility to do our best to ensure the fish we have to release live to fight another day."

And what's even better for us is that Florida Sea Grant is putting their money behind their words. Get signed up for the program and free gear today. [FS](#)

# Phase 2 Launch Recap

- May 3, 2022
  - Launched new education module
  - Expanded program to all sectors of the Gulf of Mexico reef fish fishery
  - Social posts reached over 50,000 people
    - Shared over 120 times
  - Press release picked up by 25+ news outlets
  - Program featured in podcasts, live radio shows, and magazine editorials

May 08, 2022 35 min Download

 **The Outdoor Show with Info from Nick Haddad, Mike Gallo, The Kayak Report, Those Bad Boys, Your Texts, Captain Ryan and Crawfish Haven - 5...**

More of The Outdoor Show with Don Dubuc from Crawfish Haven



FWC encourages reef fish anglers to Return 'Em Right and conserve our fisheries for the future!

**Return 'Em Right**  
Published by Sprout Social · May 3 ·

Return 'Em Right is launching to anglers Gulf-wide today! Gulf of Mexico reef fish anglers now have access to information on barotrauma, training on best release practices, and opportunities to receive FREE GEAR to help reef fish survive release! Visit [returnemright.org](http://returnemright.org) now to become part of a community of anglers committed to the future of the sport and healthy reef fisheries. #ReturnEmRight #EarnAnotherFight

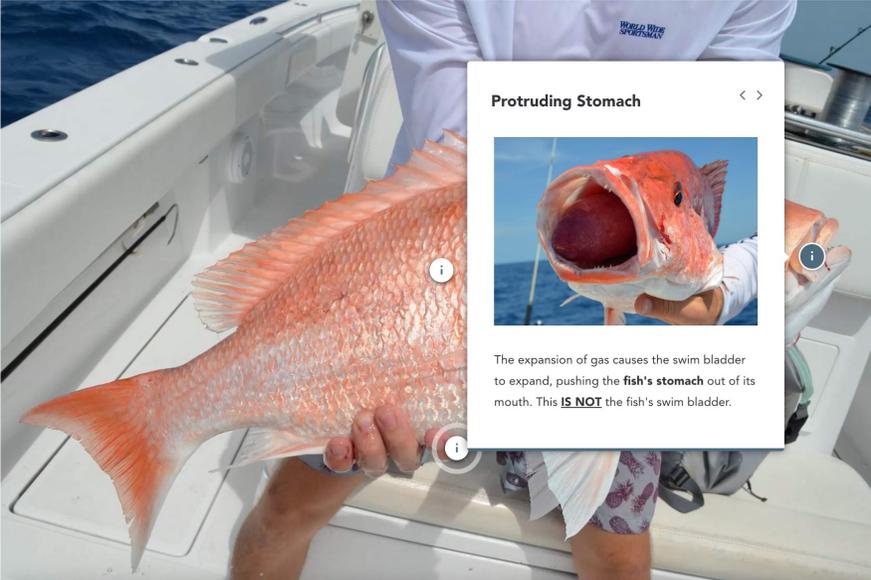
[Dibs On Bottom Adventures](#) [Colby Blackwell](#) [Reel Filletz](#) [JYG Profis...](#) See more



You and 45 others 3 Comments 121 Shares

**RETURN 'EM RIGHT**  
50% COMPLETE

- INTRODUCTION
  - Fish for the Future
- A TYPICAL FISHING TRIP
  - Trip Preparation
  - General Best Practices
  - Barotrauma
  - Solutions to Barotrauma
- SUMMARY
  - Summary



**Protruding Stomach**

The expansion of gas causes the swim bladder to expand, pushing the fish's stomach out of its mouth. This **IS NOT** the fish's swim bladder.

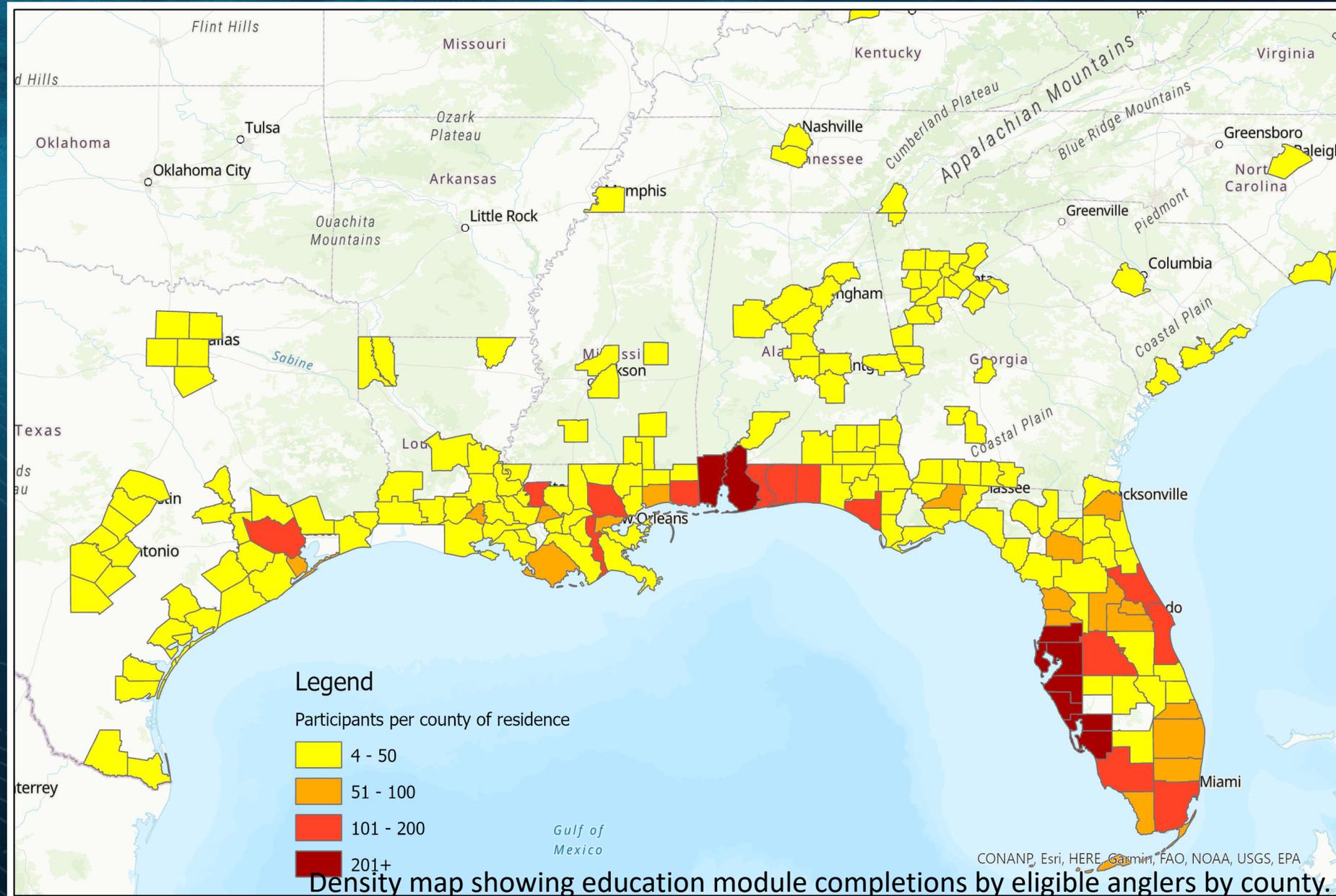
Make sure you click each information icon before proceeding!



# Education Module Stats

(\*as of 7/26/22)

- 9455 completions by eligible anglers that reef fish in the GOM
  - 88 federal for-hire
  - 154 state for-hire
  - 9201 private rec
- ~14-minute mean completion time
- 5203 follow-up surveys completed



# Public Response

**Tampa Offshore Fishing**  
Yesterday at 8:30 PM · 📷

Guys and Gals : This is probably the best idea I have seen in my 50 years here in Florida fishing for an incredible idea to save fish and it's free ! Go to [training.returnemright.org](https://training.returnemright.org) 15 minute video of training and you get a free fish descending device ! No it's not a fake site joke it's for real and an incredible idea ! Please take advantage of it ! And like it says ! If we save just 1% of fish with this device that's millions of fish ! Let's use this thing and make it 50 % survival rate Atleast! So glad my brother shared with me today ! Please check it out and love to get feedback on this incredible idea ! Thanks also to Hubbard Marine to help get the word out 🙌



TRAINING.RETURNEMRIGHT.ORG  
RETURN 'EM RIGHT!

Done! Thanks Rick that was painless and the training was actually informative.

Thanks! Knocked it out. Good training. I appreciate you posting it .

#17

I also thought the training was done very well, might stop people from venting fish by stabbing them in the stomach coming out of the mouth.

#4

Done!!! I find this amazing timing as just today we had to use a little "peer pressure" on a boat that didn't even make any attempt to release a Red Snapper correctly. Since they decided to slide right up next to us and drop lines (okay...yea...the wide open Gulf) they hooked a Red Snapper at some point. The fellas didn't EVEN break out anything, just got the fish off the hook, dumped him over the side. As soon as he stated floating along the top I spoke up about loosing the great fish. A few different things were said back and forth....luckily nothing nasty....they then broke off the fishing spot...tracked down the fish...got it down with a descender.

The moral of the story: You never know who you are fishing next to and doing the right thing isn't hard.

I've learned how to use a vent tool just this year with much success. Just today we landed a nice 26" Red Snapper, vented the fish, released with no issue...under 2-3 minutes if that.

Reply Like

#5

done i got one a couple of years ago but i lost it. this training was very well done

<https://www.thehulltruth.com/gulf-coast/1220648-get-free-gear.html>



Home > Forums > General Discussion > General Discussion >

## Free descending device or venting tool

Figured I'd post this here. Take the course, get a free device



[Private Recreational Anglers Gear Sign up - Return 'Em Right](#)

Return 'Em Right is a new program to reduce catch and release mortality from barotrauma in recreational reef fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. This angler-driven program is designed to encourage fellow anglers to learn and [Click to expand...](#)

Just finished course. Very good informatio.n

Just got my Seaqualizer today. What's nice is they already have it rigged with a free 3lb weight! Also sent a bent wire pin that also can be used, similar to the upside down hook rig I made. More stuff to throw in the boat! Tackle bag only weighs 80 lbs now!

#13 · May 25, 2022

me too, skip. it's a nice rig.we will def. get some use out of it.

<https://www.pensacolafishingforum.com/threads/free-descending-device-or-venting-tool.944362/>

After snapper fishing with the descending devices for the last four days, I wanted to report they worked flawlessly and we did not have one "floater".

I rigged one of my LP electric reels up on a dredge rod and ran two descenders on the same rod so we could send two fish down at a time. This was much easier and more effective than venting. Everyone on the boat was impressed with the ease of use and how well it worked. I even tested the devices to make sure they weren't releasing early.

Keep up the good work...

Via [info@returnemright.org](mailto:info@returnemright.org) inbox

One final suggestion. Every one of the fishing shows should be using a descending device and should be role models in this regard.

I can't tell you how important I think this is.

# Next Steps

- Develop communications and outreach work plan for next year
- Target federal for-hire captains and crew
- Evaluate follow-up surveys
  - Improve education module
  - Identify areas of additional education needs
- Expand outreach to tournaments and events in-person
- Produce new outreach products – digital and print materials
- Build partnerships with industry leaders



# HD Survey – Angler Attitudes, Perceptions and Use of Best Fishing Practices in the GOM

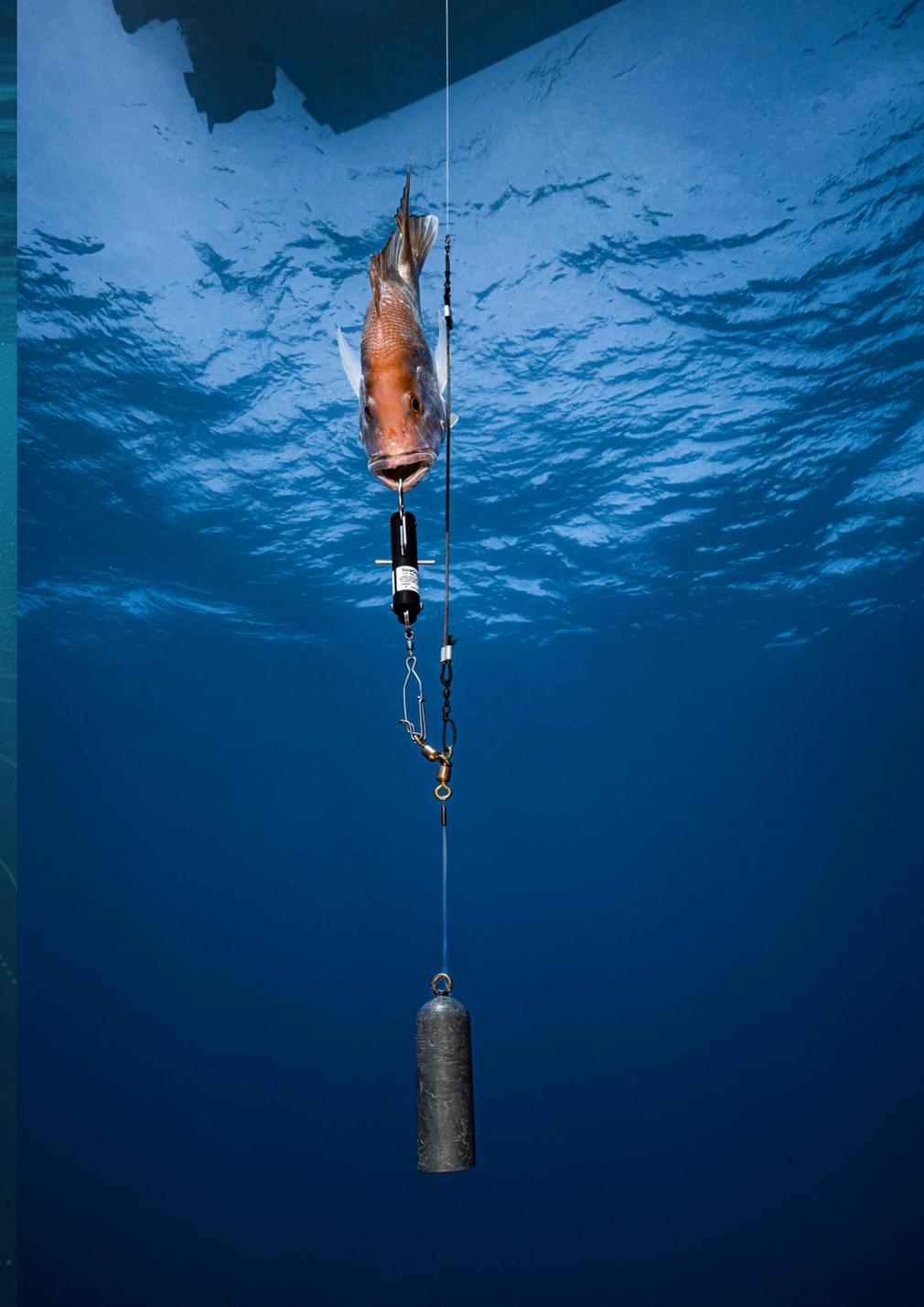


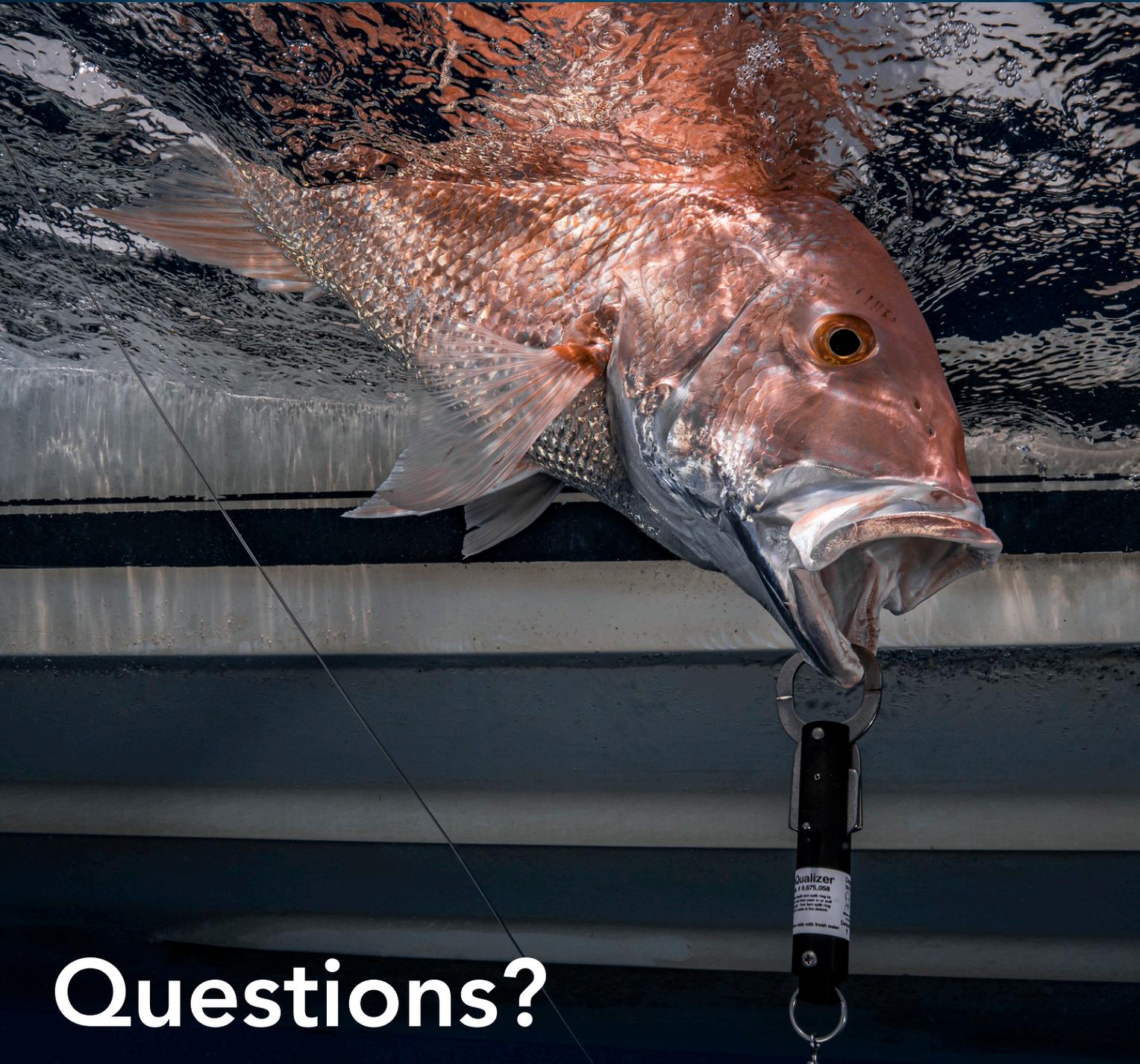
- Over 90% of anglers recognize at least one symptom of barotrauma
- 71% of private rec anglers aware of venting
  - 11-15% of anglers use a tool that doesn't meet regulations (i.e. fillet knife or ice pick)
- 32% of private rec anglers aware of descending devices
  - About half do not use them
  - Concerns with depredation by sharks and dolphins
- 56% of anglers indicated "other anglers" were primary source for reef fishing info
- Majority believe helping fish return to depth improves survival



# Release Mortality Symposium Recommendations

- ✓ Conversation should extend beyond barotrauma to encompass all fishing and handling behaviors to reduce release mortality
- ✓ Achieve consistent messaging to anglers across the Gulf... One central voice should assemble **research-based** fishing practices
- ✓ "Central command" website would be tasked with housing pertinent information on safe handling, barotrauma mitigation and other best practices
- ✓ House stock images and footage for use
- ✓ Create narrative content for fishermen by fishermen





Questions?

