A GUIDE TO BEST PRACTICE

FISHING MEGASTORE.COM

Catch & Release

This guide is to give advice on best practice to increase the chances of the fish surviving

"Game fish are too valuable to only be caught once."

Lee Wulff

Many anglers voluntarily choose to release Salmon, often as part of wider conservation measures.

Catch and release is one method by which anglers can help to safeguard Salmon and wild trout stocks in Scottish rivers and lochs. Most anglers have at some time released adult fish. For example, coloured fish close to spawning are always spared, and the release of kelts is mandatory. A modern trend is to release fish that are in prime condition, as a conservation measure.

In recent years, the number of Salmon returning to Scottish rivers has declined. Early-running or 'spring' Salmon have been particularly affected by these trends. Unfortunately, we know from a number of studies that anglers are capable of catching a surprisingly large proportion of spring Salmon – around 30%. Each fish that is caught and killed reduces the number of fish available to spawn.

Because of this, many anglers now practise catch and release, especially during the early months of the season, realising that by doing so they can make a worthwhile investment in future fisheries. Indeed, the strong trend towards catch and release can be seen in the official catch statistics. For example, in 2015 anglers reported releasing 84% of all the Salmon they caught.

It is important that fish which have been released survive their capture and handling, and go on to spawn. Recent research has shown that almost all fish will survive if they are treated properly, according to a simple set of rules.

£130M Fishing tourism delivers in excess of £130 million per year and forms a really important source of income for the Scottish tourist industry

80,000 Over the past five years the average reported rod catch (retained and released) of wild salmon and grilse

84% • Proportion of Salmon released in 2015

98% • Proportion of spring Salmon released in 2015

Protect, conserve and restore

There has been research carried out by a number of fishery trusts that has shown that the survival rate of Salmon caught and released may be close to 100% when we apply the following guidelines and practice.

Spawning success and viability of eggs may be unaffected in Salmon caught and released in late autumn using the above guidelines, and they can recover within twenty four to forty eight hours of being captured and are able to spawn successfully.

Planning ahead

Before fishing a pool, always identify where a fish can be safely landed without risk of damage on rocks or stones. If fishing alone, take a net. Traditional large mesh Salmon nets can cause split fins and tails.

Have long-nosed forceps or a similar tool close to hand for prompt hook removal. If you want a photo of your Salmon before release, have your camera ready, for example, on a neck lanyard.

Terminal tackle and fishing methods

If you intend to release some or all of your catch, it is advisable to use the appropriate tackle.

Single hooks are much easier to remove than either double or treble hooks, and barbless hooks are easier to remove than barbed ones. If you do not have barbless hooks, you can flatten the barbs with pliers. Multihooked lures should be avoided. It's illegal to use large hooks on some rivers. Use size 8, or preferably smaller.

Always use as strong a leader or line as possible. This will ensure the fish can be brought to the net quickly and safely.

The effectiveness of Rapala and similar lures can be improved by using a single or double hook sliding rig, similar to a tube fly set-up (see image).

If worm fishing, care is required to ensure that fish do not swallow baits. Worm fishing can often result in a fish dying. Where worm fishing is allowed, using a circle hook will reduce the chances of deep-hooking. These can be sourced from all good tackle shops.

Spinning

Salmon often take Flying Cs deep and more than 10% die. Fitting a barbless single will help but it's better to use other lures, with hooks altered, or to fly fish.

Playing and Landing Fish

Photo by kind permission of Alba Game Fishing Ltd

Research has shown that exposing a Salmon to air for even a short period, for example to take a photograph, can significantly reduce its chances of survival. Keep the Salmon in the water at all times. Do not at any time lift a Salmon up by the tail as this can damage the tendons in the tail of the fish. Later in the season as the Salmon nears spawning time, lifting a Salmon by the tail can cause the egg sacs in females and milt sacs in males to rupture into the body cavity which can kill the fish in extreme cases thereafter. At all times support its belly whilst handling the fish in the water.

Use a large Gye-type landing net with knotless mesh which reduces damage to the fish's scales. It is wise to avoid beaching the fish as this again can remove protective mucous and scales from the fish which can lead to fungal infection.

The Salmon that is being returned cannot be gaffed or tailed by mechanical tailer as the use of either is a criminal offence in Scotland. Both implements cause considerable damage to the fish and were used historically when fish were being killed by the angler, in the days before the catch and release initiatives, that are currently in place throughout many river systems in the UK. Always handle the Salmon with wet hands, or put on soft cotton gloves which need to be wet, when removing the hook from the fish's mouth or body if accidentally foul hooked. This prevents removing the fish's mucous which is the it's first line of defence against disease and parasites.

It is really important to try and keep the fish in the water. This is particularly important when having a photograph taken.

Use a soft, knotless net with small mesh size with a shallow, wide bottom to allow the fish to lie flat. Knotless mesh is a legal requirement.

Photos by kind permission of Bob White Scottish Ghillie salmon-fishing-scotland.blogspot.co.uk

Unhooking & Recovery

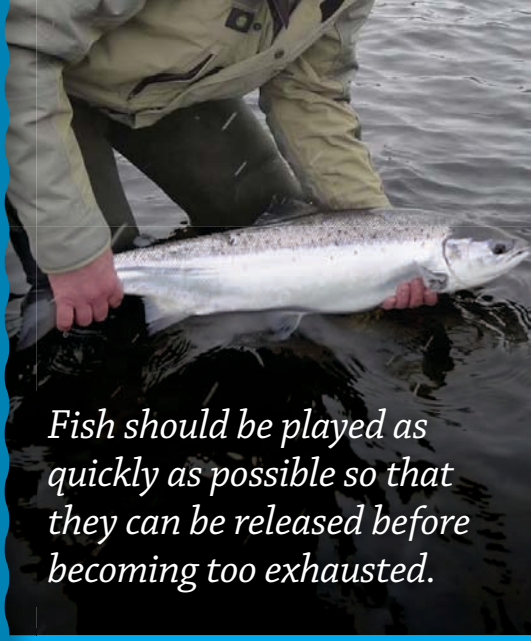
When the fish is quiet, remove the hook carefully and promptly with forceps. If you rupture a blood vessel you may kill the fish. Even if a fish is bleeding heavily, it can have a good chance of survival. Do not kill a fish simply because it is bleeding. If a fish is going to die from blood loss, it will do so very quickly.

Fish should be allowed to recover and returned in steady clean water, but not in a fast flow. Recovery may take some time.

If fish are deep-hooked, particularly in the gills, it may not be possible to remove the hook – snip the line close to the hook. This will cause less harm to the fish than removing it.

As an additional precaution, it is wise not to fish at all during extended periods of hot weather.

- **The more exhausted a fish becomes, the lower are its chances of survival. It is better to land the fish quickly, and firm pressure should be used to subdue it. The fish should be netted using a soft, knotless mesh net and kept in the water as much as possible since fish breathe through their wetted gills.**
- **The hook should be removed immediately with the fish remaining in the water. It is sometimes easier to cut the leader first and lay the rod aside so that you can concentrate fully on looking after the fish. If there is someone with you, they can help by holding the net. If you are alone, you can support the handle of the net between your knees or perhaps use the riverbank or a stone to support the net rim.**
- **Be gentle and take care to wet your hands before handling the fish. Be careful not to squeeze the fish when removing the hook. On no account put your fingers under the gill covers. Extra care is required with very fresh fish as their scales are easily dislodged and this can lead to fungal infection.**
- **Forceps or pliers make removing the hook much easier and should be kept to hand. Self-locking surgical forceps are very effective.**



Fish should be played as quickly as possible so that they can be released before becoming too exhausted.

Doing your bit

The chances of survival of a released fish depend on how it has been handled. If you handle the fish properly you can be confident that the fish will have the greatest chance of going on to spawn.

Fishing from boats

If fishing from a boat, where convenient, take the boat to the shore to land the fish. If the fish is landed in a boat, ensure that the fish is laid on a flat, wet surface for unhooking. A soaking wet towel or unhooking mat is ideal for this purpose. Laying the fish upside down will often calm it for unhooking. Fish produce most of their energy from their tails, and so holding down the tail on a flat surface will keep a fish still.

Recording your catch

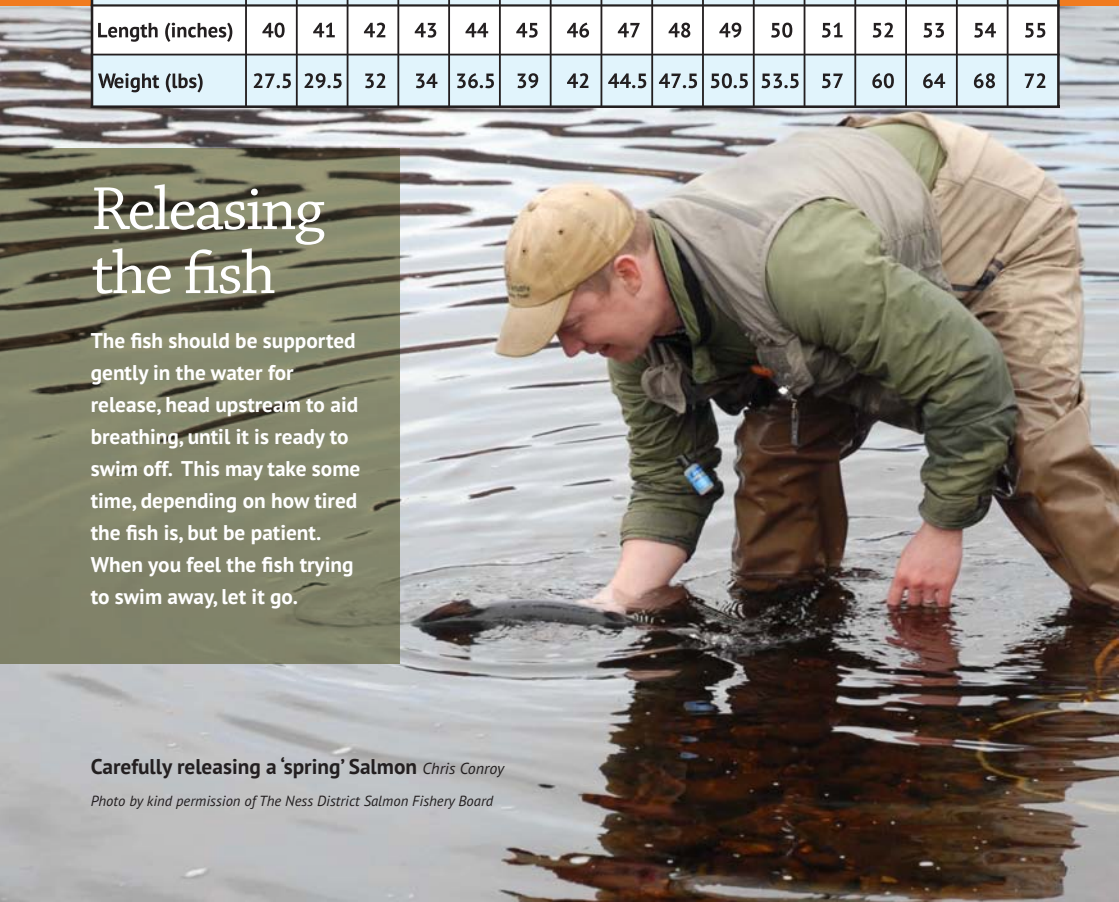
Only lift the fish from the water for the minimum time necessary.

- **PHOTOGRAPHY** - If you are alone a photograph can be taken of the fish in the net. If a companion is nearby, a photograph can be taken as you briefly lift the fish out of the water. Keep the fish in or briefly just above the water. Support the fish gently under the belly and loosely hold the wrist of the tail.
- **AVOID WEIGHING FISH** – even in nets fitted with integral scales. If necessary, you can get a good estimate of the fish's weight by measuring its length. A tape measure can be carried to do this or you can mark out the net handle, wading staff or rod.
- **MEASURING** – Do it in the water. Take a tape measure or mark up your wading staff or the butt section of your rod as an easy indicator.
- **WEIGHT** can be estimated from length – see the Environment Agency scale reproduced below. Fish should be measured from the nose to the fork of the tail.

Length (inches)	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39
Weight (lbs)	6	6.5	7.5	8.5	9.5	10.5	11.5	13	14	15.5	17	18.5	20	22	23.5	25.5
Length (inches)	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55
Weight (lbs)	27.5	29.5	32	34	36.5	39	42	44.5	47.5	50.5	53.5	57	60	64	68	72

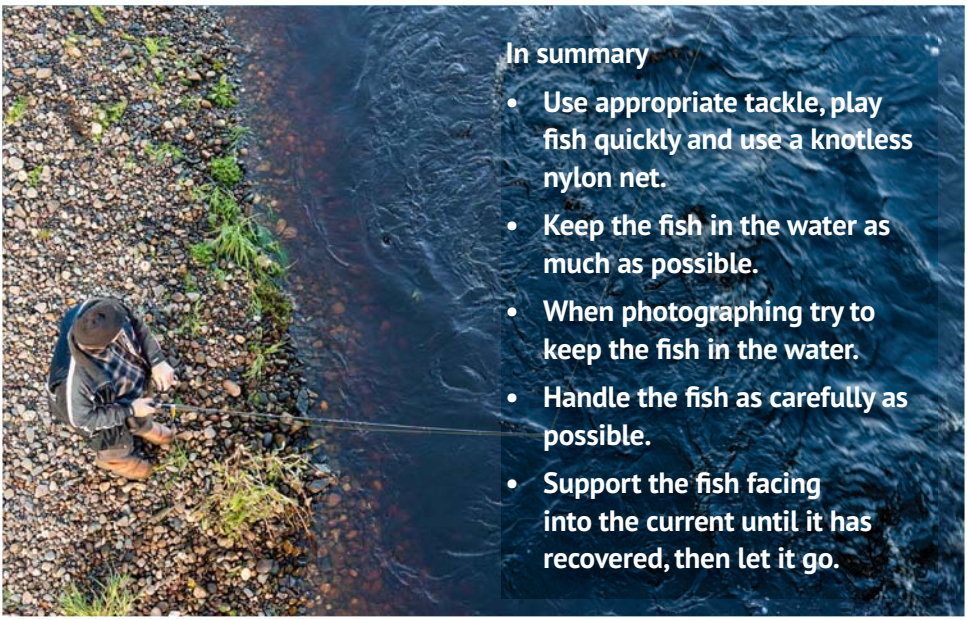
Releasing the fish

The fish should be supported gently in the water for release, head upstream to aid breathing, until it is ready to swim off. This may take some time, depending on how tired the fish is, but be patient. When you feel the fish trying to swim away, let it go.



Carefully releasing a 'spring' Salmon *Chris Conroy*

Photo by kind permission of The Ness District Salmon Fishery Board



In summary

- Use appropriate tackle, play fish quickly and use a knotless nylon net.
- Keep the fish in the water as much as possible.
- When photographing try to keep the fish in the water.
- Handle the fish as carefully as possible.
- Support the fish facing into the current until it has recovered, then let it go.

STOP THE SPREAD

STOP THE SPREAD
INVASIVE AQUATIC SPECIES
CHECK-CLEAN-DRY

Are you unknowingly spreading invasive species on your water sports equipment and clothing?

Invasive species can affect fish and other wildlife, restrict navigation, clog up propellers and be costly to manage. You can help protect the water sports you love by following three simple steps when you leave the water.

CHECK
CLEAN
DRY

CHECK your equipment and clothing for live organisms - particular in areas that are damp or hard to inspect.

CLEAN and wash all equipment, footwear and clothes thoroughly. Use hot water where possible. If you do come across any organisms, leave them at the water body where you found them.

DRY all equipment and clothing - some species can live for many days in moist conditions.

Make sure you don't transfer water elsewhere.

This leaflet has been compiled with advice and support from the following organisations and individuals:

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

ANGLING TRUST
THE VOICE OF ANGLING

Fisheries Management Scotland

Glasgow Angling Centre
FISHING MEGASTORE

Edinburgh Angling Centre
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TROUT & SALMON

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