



# primefacts

FOR PROFITABLE, ADAPTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

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## Code of practice for fishing events in NSW



### Background

Fishing competitions are an important activity for many recreational fishers and fishing clubs. They provide opportunities for family and community interaction, as well as broader economic benefits to the locality. Many competitions promote ethical and responsible fishing practices and apply conservative bag limits, size limits and release rules. Some events also raise funds to improve local recreational fishing opportunities by providing new facilities or enhancing fish stocks by supporting fish stocking and aquatic habitat restoration.

However, there are some community concerns that fishing competitions attract large numbers of fishers to an area, which may put additional pressure on local fish stocks and fishing amenities beyond normal fishing effort. It is therefore responsible practice for competition organisers to consider applying additional rules to those set in government regulations for normal recreational fishing. This will minimise concerns from other users and community groups and help ensure a positive future for fishing competitions in NSW.

### Introduction

Recreational fishing representatives and Industry & Investment NSW (formerly NSW Department of Primary Industries) have developed a Code of Practice for Fishing Events in NSW. The vision is for

all fishing events to follow the voluntary Code of Practice so that the organisers and participants operate in a safe, environmentally and socially responsible way. Event rules and activities should demonstrate best practice fishing techniques and where possible, enhance the economic benefit for the community.

### Code of practice

The Code of Practice requires that organisers and participants of fishing events:

- Promote responsible fishing practices.
- Operate in an environmentally and socially sensitive manner.
- Maximise opportunities to help the sport, the environment and the community.
- Operate in a safe manner.
- Comply with Fisheries, Maritime and Environmental Protection regulations.

### Guidelines

Guidelines have been developed to help event organisers abide by the voluntary Code of Practice. These guidelines are intended to be applicable to a wide range of fishing events whether they are 'catch and keep' or 'catch and release' format and will help to improve fishing event management in NSW.

## 1.0 Improved practices: all events

### 1.1 Fishing tackle: using tackle that maximises survival

In this code, there is an emphasis on encouraging fishing practices that improve released fish survival at all types of angling events. A large proportion of fish captured in fishing events are undersized and must be released due to minimum legal length regulations, and an increasing number of fish are now released in catch and release events. It is therefore responsible practice to ensure that all fish released have a good chance of survival. The use of appropriate fishing tackle will help to achieve this objective.

#### Hooks

Promote the use of barbless hooks, single hooks and circle hooks (non-offset preferred) to make hook removal easier and minimise the damage caused to fish.



Research has identified that hooking location is one of the most important factors in the survival of released fish. Circle hooks and lures reduce deep hooking and barbless hooks simplify hook removal.

#### Landing net

Promote the use of knotless mesh landing nets to minimise the physical damage caused to scales, skin, eyes and fins of landed fish.



Golden perch landed using knotless mesh landing net. Reducing physical damage caused during capture will improve a fish's chance of survival after release.

#### Lures

Encourage the use of artificial lures to reduce deep hooking of fish.

#### Breaking strain of line

Encourage the use of appropriate line classes for the targeted species. Suggest the use of higher breaking strain line when targeting larger fish species to minimise fight time and associated stress to the fish.

### 1.2 Number of eligible fish: reducing environmental impact

- Introduce rules that limit the unnecessary take of fish
  - Limit the number of eligible species
  - Introduce species based awards – move away from aggregate weights.
  - Consider other approaches e.g. single best fish of each species or a point score system that awards bonus points for live weigh-in of fish.
- Consider applying fish bag limits which are below those set by I&I NSW Fisheries Regulations.
- Advise anglers to only take fish to satisfy their immediate needs.

### 1.3 Length of eligible fish: Reducing environmental impact

- Consider applying additional fish size limit rules to those set by I&I NSW Fisheries Regulations.
- Consider applying rules that require all fish to beat the previous best recorded at the event. This can be done by displaying an up-to-date scoreboard and will help to reduce the presentation of unnecessary fish for recording and limit the needless taking of fish.



	1st	2nd	3rd
BREAM	1.500kg	1.200kg	1.000kg
FLATHEAD	1.200kg	1.000kg	0.800kg
LUDERICK	1.000kg	0.800kg	0.600kg
DART	0.800kg	0.600kg	0.400kg
WHITING	0.600kg	0.400kg	0.200kg
TARWINE	0.400kg	0.200kg	0.100kg
SNAPPER	0.200kg	0.100kg	0.050kg
MULLOWAY	0.100kg	0.050kg	0.020kg
SNAPPER	0.050kg	0.020kg	0.010kg
TAILOR	0.020kg	0.010kg	0.005kg
TERAGLIN	0.010kg	0.005kg	0.002kg
COBIA	0.005kg	0.002kg	0.001kg
KINGFISH	0.002kg	0.001kg	0.000kg
PEARL PERCH	0.001kg	0.000kg	0.000kg

An updated scoreboard on display during a fishing competition highlights the current winning fish. This encourages competitors to release non-prize winning fish.

#### **1.4 Fishing location: fishing pressure and environmental impact**

- Define fishing area considering the protection of important habitat and the presence of threatened species or spawning fish aggregations, etc.
- Consider possible conflict with other users of the location. Define the fishing area for the event reflecting the expected level of fishing effort (number of anglers) and restrict the numbers of entries as appropriate.

#### **1.5 Rules, regulations and prizes: encouraging participation, compliance and discouraging cheating**

- Ensure that the rules are clear, fair and consistent with relevant legislation. Provide a complaints or dispute resolution process.
- Consider making any high-value prizes available to all competitors attending the event by way of lucky door prizes, mystery lengths, etc.
- Provide trophies rather than high-value prizes as awards for best fishing captures to reduce the incentive for possible cheating.
- Consider penalties for participants that do not comply with relevant rules and regulations such as fish bag and size limits and areas that are closed for fishing.
- Inform participants of any specific local rules and regulations.
- Remind participants of any other relevant rules such as gear storage rules when travelling through closed areas e.g. Marine Park Sanctuary Zones or the permitted number of fishing lines.

#### **1.6 Entry eligibility: promotion of recreational fishing participation**

- If appropriate, consider making the event an open invitation event and not restricted to club or association members.
- Encourage event entry to people of all backgrounds and abilities.

#### **1.7 Social issues: encouraging community involvement and support**

- Encourage the involvement of the local community when organising an event. Organisations such as local community services and other sporting groups may be willing and able to provide valuable help.
- Avoid potential social conflict caused by excessive interaction between event fishers and other resource users. Consider the availability of resources such as fishing grounds, boat ramps, fish cleaning tables, etc. Consider the fishing area and the event start and finish times to avoid potential conflict.

#### **1.8 Economic benefits: ensuring economic benefits to the wider community**

- Utilise the event to generate increased tourism to the locality. Involve and consult with local tourism bodies, Chambers of Commerce, businesses, local council, etc.
- Use the event to raise funds that will benefit recreational fishing in the locality (fish stocking, new facilities, etc).

#### **1.9 Educational and research benefits: promoting responsible fishing and fishing techniques**

- Incorporate the instruction of responsible fishing practices and/or improved fishing techniques within the event format.
- Support approved scientific programs or other areas of research where possible.

#### **1.10 Safety: considering the welfare of participants, organisers and others**

- Consider safety issues when planning the event location, timing, weather conditions, etc.
- Give participants advice on good safety practices to be exercised during the event.
- Carry out a site specific risk assessment and develop a safety plan.
- Consider and obtain appropriate insurance for the event, as necessary.

#### **1.11 Accreditation Scheme**

- Fishing event organisers are encouraged to complete a fishing competition accreditation scheme such as NEATFish.

#### **2.0 Improved practices: catch and keep events**

##### **2.1 Disposal of fish and the reduction of fish waste: Reducing environmental impact and social conflict**

- Introduce rules that discourage high-grading (where fish are retained and later replaced by a bigger fish).
- Minimise fish waste by introducing rules that limit the number of fish taken during the event.
- Participants should be encouraged to utilise all fish that are taken as part of a fishing event and carefully release all other fish.
- Wasteful dumping of fish should be strongly discouraged.
- Facilitate the removal of fish waste generated by event.

### 3.0 Improved practices: catch and release events

#### 3.1 Eligible fish: maximising released fish survival by targeting appropriate species

- Ensure that the target species (fish that are eligible in the event) have a good chance of survival under the event format and environmental conditions.

#### 3.2 Live fish holding facilities: maximising released fish survival by using appropriate holding facilities

- Encourage anglers to use appropriate live fish-holding facilities. The fish-holding facilities should reflect the needs of the targeted species according to their size and biology.

#### 3.3 Total time fish are held: maximising released fish survival by reducing retention time

- Consider applying rules that allow immediate release of captured fish. Examples include camera validation (e.g. catch-photo-release), tagging or the 'buddy system' (where a fishing companion witnesses the capture, recording and release of a fish).
- Use multiple recording stations and/or on-water marshals. This minimises the need to travel long distances to have fish recorded and reduces the retention time of live fish.



*A well aerated, home made live well. Live wells need to be an appropriate size and provide sufficient water quality for fish held. Flow-through live wells provide best water quality.*

#### 3.4 Handling techniques used by recorders: increasing fish survival by reducing physical damage

- Fish recording should be undertaken using good handling techniques including the use of soft wet gloves, nets and damp release mats.
- Consider recording length rather than weight of fish to reduce handling.



*Mullet being measured using damp gloves and release mat to reduce chance of injury.*

#### 3.5 Site of fish release after recording: minimising behavioural disruption to fish

- Fish should be released into the same or similar environment (within the same water body) as to where it was captured, ideally through immediate release.

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