

Hooked on No Hooks

Catch and Release

In recent years, the number of recreational line fishers and charter fishing operations has steadily increased and commercial fishers have shifted from netting to line fishing operations.

Increasing pressure has therefore been placed on Australia's line fishing resources. Protected species such as turtles and seabirds are often left with embedded hooks and trailing entangling line.

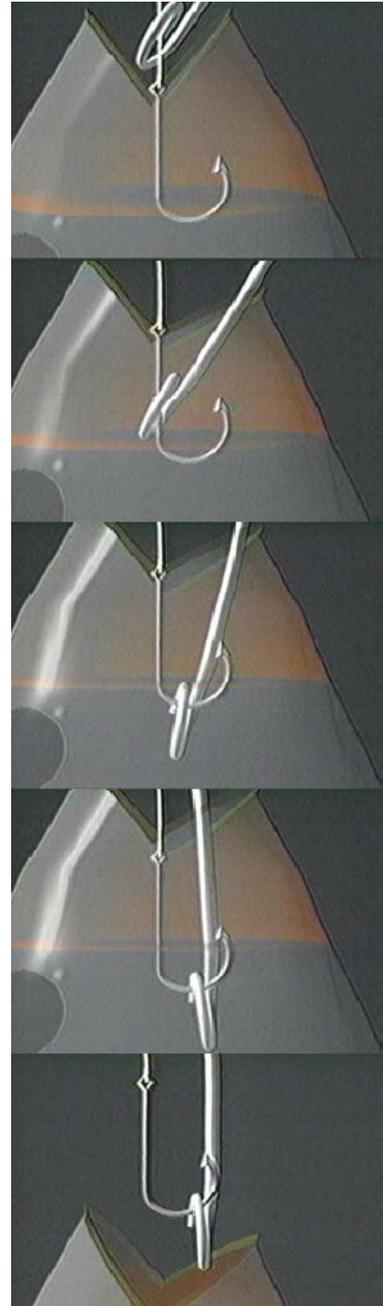
Although the number of fish taken has grown, so has the number of fish released, due to increasingly stringent fisheries regulations and an increase in the popularity of recreational catch and release fishing.

The damage caused to a fish after capture is directly proportional to the level of handling. Extended handling increases oxygen deprivation and may damage scales and the protective mucus coat, increasing exposure to pathogens and parasites. The 'National Strategy for the Survival of Released Line-Caught Fish' recommends that wherever possible, fish to be released should be retained in water and the use of gaffs and abrasive landing nets should be avoided.

De-Hookers

De-hooking devices facilitate the quick and efficient release of hooked animals, therefore increasing their chance of survival. Veterinarians confirm that the most important aspect of survival for some species is the removal of the hook.

The deep-hooked de-hooker removes deeply swallowed hooks from the mouth and throat.



When the hook is being removed, its point is protected by the off-set bend and does not re-engage. The J-style de-hooker device removes hooks from the lip and mouth. Both devices come in various sizes depending on their application. To compensate for the freeboard height of a vessel there are also longer 34", 6' and 8' de-hookers, which allow for the release of animals too large or dangerous to be brought on deck.

Trials in the Commercial Pelagic Longline Fishery

De-hookers have been trialed in the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF) and Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery (WTBF). These fisheries use pelagic longlines to target bigeye and yellowfin tuna and swordfish. SeaNet, an environmental extension service to the commercial fishing industry, secured funding from the Threatened Species Network¹ to purchase 12 sets of de-hookers to trial and promote. Following workshops demonstrating their operation, fishers from the ETBF and WTBF used the dehookers in their daily operations and successfully released bycatch including marlin, juvenile swordfish and tuna, sunfish, sharks and protected species such as turtles. The industry agrees that de-hookers have proven beneficial; more hooks are retained and the removal of hooks is more efficient. There has also been a reduction in the risk of injury to crew through interactions with teeth, bills and beaks.

Increasing Uptake

Other fishers in the ETBF and WTBF are keen to use dehookers, and SeaNet has recently secured enough sets to ensure every vessel in the tuna fishery is properly equipped. This will allow SeaNet to introduce de-hookers into other commercial hook and line fisheries and potentially the recreational fishing sector.

For more information or a copy of the instructional DVD contact Dave Kreutz - SeaNet Extension Officer Queensland on 0432 683 147 or e-mail: david@oceanwatch.org.au



Close up of the head of the de-hooker



Australian Government

SeaNet is a program of OceanWatch Australia funded by the Australian Government.

www.oceanwatch.org.au

OceanWatch Australia is a national environmental, not-for-profit company that works to achieve sustainability in the Australian seafood industry through protecting and enhancing fish habitats, improving water quality and advancing the sustainability of fisheries through action based partnerships with the Australian seafood industry, government, natural resource managers, private enterprise and the community.