

HANDLING AND RELEASE GUIDELINES

for manta and devil rays (Mobulid species)



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Safety of fishing crew is priority in all fish handling and release operations. There is no danger of a sting from manta and devil rays, though care should be taken to avoid knocks or blows from the wings of medium and large rays. Note that rays entangled in nets or lines may appear dead and thrash when released therefore consideration should be given on how to approach and release them.

Devil and manta rays are medium to large open water, filter feeding members of the shark, ray and skate family, which are known as cartilaginous fishes (have skeletons made from cartilage). They are found in tropical and subtropical waters around the world and are vulnerable to overfishing as they grow and reproduce very slowly.

Manta and devil rays are fragile and susceptible to internal damage when out of the water. They also must continue to swim to breathe and can die easily from suffocation if they remain still for too long.

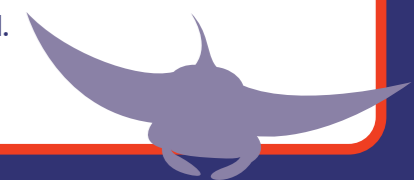
✓ DO'S

- ✓ Try to disentangle rays before they are hauled a board.
- ✓ Disentangle animals caught in gillnets with care.
- ✓ For small rays captured in longlines, gently bring on board and remove as much gear as possible by backing the hook out.
- ✓ If hooks are embedded, either cut the hook with bolt cutters or cut the line at the hook and gently return the animal to the sea.
- ✓ For medium to large rays (>30 kg), leave the animal in the water and use a dehooker to remove the hook or a long-handled line cutter to cut the gear as close to the hook as possible (ideally leaving <0.5 meters of line attached to the animal).
- ✓ Avoid areas with known or predicted high densities of rays ("hotspots").
- ✓ Reduce soak times when rays are present and schooling.
- ✓ Plan ahead and have equipment ready.
- ✓ Return rays to the water with a knotless scoop or flat surfaced object such as an ice shovel.



✗ DON'TS

- ✗ Do not attempt to force the animal through meshes or flip animals over the float and lead lines to access the other side of the net, carefully disentangle the animal by removing twists or cutting the net if absolutely necessary.
- ✗ Do not gaff, drag, carry, lift or pull a ray by its "cephalic lobes/devil horns" or tail
- ✗ Do not carry or drag a ray by inserting your hands into the gill slits or the spiracles.
- ✗ Do not stand on the ray.
- ✗ Do not hit or slam a ray against any surface to remove the animal from the line this will cause severe damage and likely death to the animal.
- ✗ Do not attempt to dislodge an imbedded hook by pulling on the branch or line.
- ✗ Do not attempt to lift medium to large (>30 kg) rays aboard the vessel.
- ✗ Do not cut the tail.



Bringing a manta or devil ray on-board a vessel

It is highly recommended to avoid bringing a manta or devil ray on-board; however, if it is not possible to disentangle from the net or remove hooks while the ray is in the water (for example, the animal is heavily twisted in the net or if the animal has been hooked ventrally), carefully bring it on-board without causing damage to the body.

Make every attempt to support the ray's weight by at least two points (i.e. one point of contact being the midsection, and the other being the posterior end of the body) or preferably have 2 to 3 people carry the ray by the sides of each wing.



Releasing a manta or devil ray from the side of a vessel

Ensure that the ray is supported and returned slowly to the water and if required, assist recovery by allowing water to flow over/through the gills before release.

If possible, avoid releasing the ray in the vicinity of hauling gear and or processing of catch to the reduce recapture and depredation.

RECREATIONAL FISHING INTERACTIONS

Interactions between manta and devil rays and the recreational fishing sector are uncommon and usually the result of foul hooking while casting, trolling or jigging lures.

If a small ray is hooked, and the ray can be safely retrieved, the hook should be removed or the line cut as short as possible to minimise stress on the animal.

If a large ray is hooked, the line should be cut as soon and as short as possible and practicable.