



# BEST CATCH, HANDLE AND RELEASE PRACTICES FOR SHARK FISHING

Rod and reel is the only gear type permitted for recreational fishing for sharks in Atlantic Canadian waters.

## FISHING TECHNIQUE

In order to reduce injury and exhaustion to yourself and the shark, use the following steps:

- Plan your release strategy before the hook is set and make sure tools are easily accessible.
- Observe the float at all times, so that the hook can be quickly set.
- Regardless of the hook type being used, set the hook as quickly as possible so that the shark gets caught in the corner of the mouth and not in the gut.
- Once a shark is hooked, all other lines should be reeled in immediately in order to focus on fighting one fish at a time.
- Limit fight time as much as possible.
- Maneuver the boat to follow a hooked shark and gain line whenever possible. Avoid fighting the shark from a dead drift, as this can cause injuries to people and sharks.



## AT-VESSEL HANDLE AND RELEASE

It is recommended that, wherever possible, captured sharks be kept in the water. In order to enhance post-release survival, use the following steps:

- Bring the shark as close as possible to the boat. Wear gloves and minimize physical handling of the shark. Do not use a gaff to bring the shark closer, as this will severely injure it.



- Do not hold the shark by its gills. This may cause serious injury or lead to death.
- Remove the hook with a dehooking tool. If the shark has swallowed the hook or been foul hooked and the hook cannot be safely removed, cut the leader as close to the hook as possible.



- If the shark is exhausted, due to extended fight time, reviving the shark is necessary to ensure it survives. Depending on the size of your vessel, there are a few options for reviving sharks. Begin by orienting the shark parallel with the boat (head facing the bow):
  - While the hook remains in the shark's mouth, hold the leader in hand (or securely attach it to the vessel) and put the boat in idle.
  - Place a cable around its body (i.e. behind its pectoral fins). Hold both ends of the cable in hands and put the boat into idle. Take care to avoid the gills when securing and removing the cable.

Swim the shark alongside the vessel for a minimum of 10-15 minutes, until the mouth begins pumping and/or the tail is moving well on its own. Be sure to remove the hook and any gear prior to releasing the shark.

*An in-water harness can be used to support sharks next to vessel and ensure handling is minimized.*

## ONBOARD HANDLE AND RELEASE

Sharks are fragile animals when taken out of the water. Extreme care must be taken when handling them. If you intend on bringing a shark onboard the vessel, use the following steps to enhance post-release survival:

- Once the shark is next to the boat, lift the shark out of the water horizontally, so as to not tear any ligaments, tendons or damage internal organs. Do not lift the shark out of the water by its head, gills, dorsal fin or tail.
  - Small sharks are best handled using both hands; one holding the dorsal fin, pectoral fin or neck (i.e. between the gills and dorsal fin) and the other holding the tail or supporting the body.
  - Medium to large sharks should be handled by two persons. One person holds the head, dorsal fin and/or pectoral fin while the other person holds the tail and supports the body. The belly and teeth should always face away from the handlers.



- If available, the use of a harness to raise the shark out of the water is recommended.
- Remove the hook with a dehooking tool. If the shark has swallowed the hook or been foul hooked and the hook cannot be safely removed, cut the leader as close to the hook as possible.
- Lay the shark on its side in a shady, wet area. Do not squeeze, kick, kneel, hold or wrestle the shark.



- To calm down a stressed shark, cover its eyes with a piece of smooth, wet cloth. Never press against the eyes.
- Limit air exposure (i.e. initial removal until release) to three minutes or less; any longer and the gills may become damaged.
- If exposure may be longer than three minutes, sharks should be ventilated by putting a hose in the shark's mouth to pass fresh ocean water over its gills. Ensure the hose is set at low pressure and is running before putting it in the shark's mouth.



- Before returning the shark to the water, test the shark's eye reflex - an indicator of stress. Tap next to the eye. If the eyelid closes quickly then the shark is in good condition. If the eyelid is sluggish or not responsive, then the shark should be revived. Follow steps in "At-Vessel Handle and Release" step d for how to revive a shark.

- When returning the shark to the water, be sure that the shark is returned to the water head first and follow the instructions for handling sharks above.

*If a shark is injured and/or foul hooked, it should not be brought onboard, but revived and released immediately.*

