



Marine Resources



Descending Rockfish

Required when releasing rockfish outside of 30 fathoms

How can I help a rockfish suffering from barotrauma?

Using descending devices, anglers can return weak or buoyant rockfish back to deep water, reversing many of the signs of barotrauma and increasing the likelihood of that fish's survival. Research conducted has shown that even fish with severe signs of barotrauma can recover when safely **returned to a depth of at least 66 feet**.

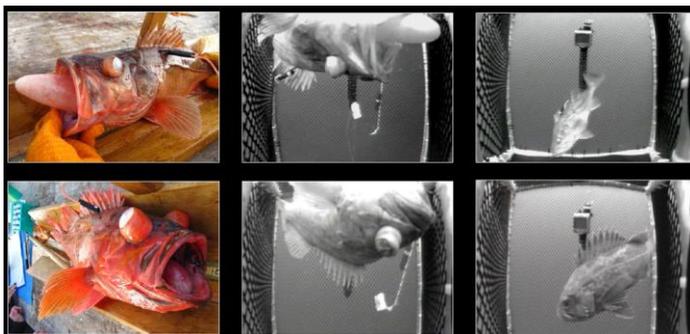


Different kinds of descending devices are available at tackle shops and online. The most common designs use an inverted, barbless hook (i.e. [Shelton Fish Descender](#)), or a jaw clamp (i.e. [Fish Grip](#), [RokLees](#) and [SeaQualizer](#)) to hold the fish's lower lip and lower it through the water. The SeaQualizer releases automatically at a pre-specified depth, while the other designs require a quick tug once the fish has returned to a depth greater than 66 feet.

DIY instructions to make your own descending device, such as [modifying a Fish Grip](#), are easily found online. Descending devices require a varying amount of weight to offset the buoyancy of the rockfish. (Tip: with the Fish Grip device, use rubber bands around the handle to keep the clamp closed securely on the fish's jaw.)

Recompression: good for fish, good for anglers!

A fish at the surface is highly vulnerable to predation—but if you return it to depth, you give it a better chance at survival, and you give fishermen a better chance at a longer season.



FOLLOWING CAPTURE IN CAGE AT SURFACE 100 FEET BELOW SURFACE

Barotrauma

Injury caused by a change in air pressure.

When a rockfish is brought to the surface, gas in the swim bladder expands. A fish suffering from barotrauma will have a swollen body, stomach or esophagus protruding into its mouth, and/or bulging eyes. The expanded gas can make the fish too buoyant to swim back down to depth.



When a descending device is used to release yelloweye rockfish, more survive than when they are released at the surface. This means that the sport fishery bycatch quota for yelloweye rockfish is used up at a slower rate, keeping fishing opportunities for healthy target species, such as lingcod and black rockfish, open longer.

Are there other tricks or tips when releasing rockfish?

Handle with care

- Have your descending device ready to use, and keep air time and handling to a minimum.
- Hold the rockfish by the lower lip and use wet hands, wet gloves, or a wet towel to avoid removing the protective slime layer from the fish.
- **Using a descending device to release any rockfish with signs of barotrauma is strongly recommended, even where it is not required.**

Don't vent

"Venting," or puncturing a fish's body or the protruding esophagus to allow gas to escape, is not recommended. It can cause serious injury or infection.



Beyond releasing rockfish... What else can I do to fish responsibly?

Get an "A" in avoidance

What's better than releasing a rockfish at depth? Avoiding the ones you can't keep in the first place! When fishing for halibut or lingcod, stay away from rocky pinnacles and other complex structures. Some species, such as yelloweye rockfish, are highly associated with these habitats. When you are encountering a lot of fish you must release, move to another location or reef.

Be a citizen scientist - report released fish

It is important to report the species and number of released fish accurately when interviewed by ODFW samplers. Data collected on the docks is used to help determine the size and productivity of the many different fish populations that call the Oregon Coast home, in addition to managing the quotas. If unsure of the species, you can snap a close-up photo before release, and a sampler may be able to help with ID.

Correctly identify your catch

The many species of rockfish can be challenging to identify, but this information is essential for fishery management and stock assessment. Here are some resources that may help you ID the fish you let go: recfin.org/resources/fished/, and myodfw.com/articles/rockfish-identification-tips.

Sport Regulations:

Any vessel fishing for, or possessing, groundfish or halibut in the ocean must have a functional descending device onboard and ready to use, regardless of depth. Anglers must use it when releasing any rockfish seaward of the 30-fathom regulatory line (180 feet).