

A photograph of a man with grey hair, wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt, a tan vest, and green waders, standing in a stream. He is leaning forward, releasing a salmon into the water. The water is dark and rippled. The background is a soft-focus view of the stream and surrounding vegetation.

# Catch & Release

## An Angler's Guide

Many anglers voluntarily choose to release salmon, often as part of wider conservation measures. Numerous angling and radio-tracking studies have demonstrated high survival rates and successful spawning for salmon released after capture - up to 100%

under certain conditions. However, the longer a fish is out of water, or poorly handled, the less chance it has of survival.

So, to give your salmon the best opportunity of reaching the spawning redds, handle with great care - and follow the advice in this leaflet.

## Tackle advice

Barbless hooks are strongly advised if fish are to be released. Single & double hooks cause much less damage than trebles, which should be avoided. There's less risk of damage with smaller hooks. The effectiveness of rapala and similar lures can be improved by using a single or double hook sliding rig, similar to a tube fly set-up (see image).



Image courtesy B Davidson



If worm fishing, skill is required to ensure that fish do not swallow baits. Using circle hooks (picture) will reduce the chances of deep hooking. These can be sourced from all good tackle shops.

Always use as strong a leader material as possible. This will ensure the fish can be brought to the net quickly and safely.



## Planning ahead

Before fishing a pool, always identify where a fish can be safely landed without risk of damage on rocks or stones. If fishing alone, take a net. Traditional large mesh salmon nets can cause split fins and tails.

Have long-nosed forceps or a similar tool close to hand for prompt hook removal. If you want a photo of your salmon before release, have your camera ready, for example, on a neck lanyard.



## Playing fish

Fish should be played quickly and as firmly as possible so that they can be released before becoming too exhausted.

## Landing fish

**Never lift your salmon from the water by its tail, or gill cover.** Fish should be kept in the water if at all possible. Avoid taking them onto the bank or dragging them over stones or gravel.



Split tail caused by large mesh



Typical fish friendly net

Use a soft, knotless net with small mesh size and rectangular shape with a shallow, wide bottom to allow the fish to lie flat.

**Knotless mesh is a legal requirement.**

## Fishing from boats

If fishing from a boat, where convenient, take the boat to the shore to land the fish. If the fish is landed in a boat, ensure that the fish is laid on a flat, wet surface for unhooking. A soaking wet towel or unhooking mat is ideal for this purpose. Laying the fish upside down will often calm it for unhooking. Fish produce most of their energy from their tails, and so holding down the tail on a flat surface will keep a fish still.

# Bleeding fish

Even if a fish is bleeding heavily, it can have a good chance of survival. Do not kill a fish simply because it is bleeding. If a fish is going to die from blood loss, it will do so very quickly. Fish should be allowed to recover and returned in steady clean water,

but not in a fast flow. Recovery may take some time.

If fish are deep-hooked, particularly in the gills, it may not be possible to remove the hook – snip the line close to the hook. This will cause less harm to the fish than removing it.

# Recording your catch

Only lift the fish from the water for the minimum time necessary.

**Photography** - When photographing a fish, keep it in, or briefly just above the water. Support the fish gently under the belly and loosely hold the wrist of the tail.

**Weighing** - If possible, use a weight net, or scales hooked onto a conventional net.

**Measuring** – do it in the water. Take a tape measure or mark up your wading staff or the butt section of your rod as an easy indicator. A good general guide for differentiating between grilse and salmon after mid-June is 28". Weight can be estimated from length – see the 'Sturdy' scale reproduced below. Fish should be measured from the nose to the fork of the tail.



Length (inches)	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39
Weight (lbs)	6	6.5	7.5	8.5	9.5	10.5	11.5	13	14	15.5	17	18.5	20	22	23.5	25.5
Length (inches)	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55
Weight (lbs)	27.5	29.5	32	34	36.5	39	42	44.5	47.5	50.5	53.5	57	60	64	68	72

This leaflet has been compiled with advice and support from the following organisations and individuals:



[www.salmon-trout.org](http://www.salmon-trout.org)



Association of  
Salmon Fishery Boards



supported by  
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**HARDY**  
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BORN TO FISH

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