

ANGLER THOUGHTS AND BEHAVIORS ABOUT BEST FISHING PRACTICES

A survey of Gulf angler attitudes, perceptions, awareness and actions



**RETURN'EM
RIGHT**

What we did: Obtain baseline information on Gulf of Mexico recreational reef fish angler behavior and best practices.

Who we surveyed:

- 🐟 Recreational anglers in the Gulf of Mexico who fished during 2021.
- 🐟 4,194 surveys used in this analysis, resulting in a 14% response rate.

Why we surveyed: Reducing release mortality in the Gulf of Mexico is a priority for the recreational fishery.

- 🐟 Anglers require educational outreach to ensure tools are used properly to reduce discard mortality.
- 🐟 Information on anglers' understanding of best release practices will help us develop effective outreach.
- 🐟 This survey is the first part of a Gulf-wide study of anglers. A follow-up survey will be conducted in 2024 to measure changes in angler knowledge.

>90%

*of anglers recognized at
least one sign of barotrauma*

WHAT WE FOUND:

Anglers want to help fish survive and understand releasing fish properly can help them survive

Most anglers are fishing in depths where fish may need additional help returning to depth

Venting is the most commonly known barotrauma mitigation measure

There is a lack of knowledge around descending devices and the benefits they can provide

There are barriers, including accessibility, to using descending devices, and outreach is needed to communicate their value

Additional outreach and education is needed on best venting practices

Anglers learn from each other, so an effective outreach campaign will have positive long-term impacts

Increasing efforts to share research results may help reduce predation/depredation concerns

THE DATA:

88% help fish return to depth when needed and believe this leads to higher survival

The majority of private reef anglers fish in waters deeper than 60 feet, except in FL (42%)

71% of private reef anglers are aware of venting

32% of reef anglers are aware of fish descending devices

Almost half of all reef anglers that are aware of fish descending devices do not use them or have one on the boat

Up to 15% of reef anglers use a venting tool that doesn't meet regulations

56% of reef anglers primarily get their information from other anglers

There are concerns that descending devices contribute to predation/depredation

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