OAA GUIDANCE ON CATCH AND RELEASE

Releasing recreationally caught fish to fight another day helps ensure there will be fish to catch today, tomorrow, and for anglers in the future. Catch and release fishing done correctly helps preserve your sport.

Planning Ahead

- Before fishing a pool, always identify where a fish can be safely landed with a net without risk of damage on rocks or stones.
- 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. Take the picture in the net where the fish can also be measured. Please try not to take a trophy photo of every fish you catch the longer they are out of the water the less chance they have of surviving.

Landing Fish

- We urge you not to lift the fish out of the water by any means. At the very least, never lift your salmonid from the water by its tail or gill cover you may cause internal damage. Avoid taking them onto the bank or dragging them over stones or gravel.
- Use a soft, knotless net with small mesh size with a shallow wide bottom to allow the fish to lie flat. Knotless mesh is a legal requirement. The traditional large mesh salmonid nets can cause split fins and tails, you can't use a landing net with any meshes that are knotted or made of metallic material, and this is a legal requirement.
- Suitable replacement net bags are available from Keens and Ewenny Angling and I'm sure if you require a certain size either shop would order you one in.
- It is now within our Bylaws that: - A landing net must be carried at all times when fishing.

Unhooking & Recovery

- When the fish is quiet, remove the hook carefully and promptly with forceps. If you rupture a blood vessel you may kill the fish. This can be limited by using circle or barbless hooks or even semi barbed hooks.

- Fish should be allowed to recover and returned in steady clean water, but not in a fast flow. Recovery may take some time; the fish should be kept upright in the steady flow and not moved in a backwards and forward motion, this will only hinder the recovery.
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- 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.
- As an additional precaution, it is wise not to fish at all during extended periods of hot weather.

Recording Your Catch

- Only lift the fish from the water for the minimum time necessary.
- Photography - Keep the fish 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 weigh net, or scales hooked on to 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.
- Weight can be estimated from length.

Length(Ins)	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37
Weight(lbs)	5	6	6.5	7.5	8.25	9.25	10.5	12	13	14.25	16	17	19	20.5

These weights are fresh run weights a fish that has been in the river for a few months will weigh less as it burns up its reserve energy to survive till spawning.

The main factors found to reduce survival are:

- Fishing method, including tackle and baits
- Deep hooking leading to tissue damage and bleeding
- Physical damage from poor and excessive handling leading to scale loss abrasions and infection
- Being kept out of the water for a prolonged period causing tissue and gill damage
- High water temperatures

Close links have been found between water temperature and survival in salmonoid, with elevated temperatures causing higher rates of mortality following release. Survival rates for salmonoid are greatly increased if appropriate angling techniques and equipment are used, and best practices for catching, handling and releasing angled fish are adopted.

Best Practices

To give the fish the best chance of full recovery from capture and further contributing to the fishery or going on to spawn, try and follow these best practice measures:

- Consider the most appropriate angling method and tackle to use where catch and release is mandatory, or where release is intended.
- Minimise angling duration to avoid fish becoming exhausted. This is particularly important at high water temperatures.
- Avoid angling at high water temperatures.
- Use single barbless hooks to minimise risk of injury.
- Use the least harmful bait/lure type (for example, artificial lures with minimal, appropriately sized, barbless hooks fished actively), even though it may not be the most effective for catching fish.
- Minimise air exposure, ideally not removing the fish from the water during landing, unhooking and photographing.
- Use fish-friendly landing nets with soft knotless mesh to help protect fish from abrasion injury.
- Handle fish gently with wet hands and do not squeeze as this can damage internal organs. Avoid touching the gills and eyes when handling.
- Always support the fish under the belly and keep in an upright / horizontal position, preferably underwater and facing into the current.
- Remove the hook with a long pair of forceps, disgorger or another unhooking device. When it is not be possible to remove the hook, cut the leader as close to the hook as possible as the hook will work its way out. This is less damaging than prolonged handling.

Releasing Fish

Avoid weighing fish – even in nets fitted with integral scales. If necessary, you can get a good estimate of the fish's weight by measuring its length. A tape measure can be carried to do this or you can mark out the net handle, wading staff or rod. If you are alone a photograph can be taken of the fish in the net. If a companion is nearby, a photograph can be taken as you briefly lift the fish out of the water.

The fish should be supported gently in the water for release, head upstream to aid breathing, until it makes to swim off. This may take some time, depending on how tired the fish is, but be patient. When you feel the fish trying to swim away, let it go. Please be patient and don't move the fish backwards and forwards in the water this doesn't help in recovery.