

Handling Australian Bass

Here's a quick article highlighting a few key pointers I have learnt about handling fish over the last few years.

1) Always handle native fish with extreme care. Don't take them from the water longer than you'd want your head held underwater and let's face it that's not very long at all. An environet makes a great temporary livewell while you're getting your camera/measuring device ready



Figure 1: Fish belong underwater!



Figure 2: Thumb Grip Technique

2) Always support the weight of the fish when taking them from the water. Imagine someone picking you up by the head, it would be extremely uncomfortable and can cause problems in the spine and other joints. Always have a hand under the belly.

3) Never use metal lipgrippers on bass (Or any fish in my opinion), they can (and quite often do) tear a large hole in the throat. I'm sure it would be very stressful and uncomfortable for the fish even if you support the fish's weight and it doesn't tear a large hole. The thumb grip (sticking your thumb in the mouth, see pics below) is a popular method but I've even started shying away from this method as it would be a good way to spread bacteria to fish and at times I've heard a noise that to me sounds like jaw ligaments tearing when the fish thrashes around. Bass have no teeth so don't worry about them taking a chunk out of your finger



Figure 3: No TEETH = NO WORRIES

4) Always crush your barbs. It doesn't take much time to get used to using barbless hooks. Keep tension between you and the fish and you won't lose any. When (not if) you do get a hook in your hand you'll be VERY grateful that you crushed your barbs and if (god forbid) you ever get a hook in the eye it may mean the difference between losing your sight and a full recovery.

5) Always wet your hands before handling fish. Fish have a natural layer of slime (or mucus) that protects them. A friend who works in the dpi has seen fish with a perfect fungus handprint.

If you pick the fish up by the stomach then you will wet your hands as you pick them up. Win win in my opinion.

6) Bass have a something called a gill raker on their (funnily enough) gills. The absolute worst this can do is give you a paper cut. While it is best to avoid the gills don't be afraid of the fish. Fear is the number one cause of mistreatment in fish. They cannot hurt you badly, if you're worried about nicks and scrapes then sudoku is a much better hobby than bass fishing. Most of your injuries will happen getting to the bass spot not handling the fish.

Please do not pick a fish up by the gills. I compare this to someone lifting me up by the ribcage which I imagine to be a very painful experience. It will also be a painful experience for the angler as you will also find the gill rakers quite quickly.....

7)If using barbless hooks (which is highly recommended) then you will be able to easily slip the hook out of the fish's mouth in the net. This will make handling the fish a lot easier and a lot less hazardous. The use of single hooks makes things even easier.

8) Use an environet or a net made from a similar material. I like the environet, because of its size it makes a perfect temporary livewell and trebles tend not get caught up in the mesh as can happen in other nets. At \$50 I thought they were a bit expensive but it has become an integral part of my fishing. I'm lost without it.

9)If using a brag mat give it a quick dip in the water before you place the fish onto it. This will help make the mat the same temperature as the fish and will stop the fishes protective mucus rubbing off onto the mat. Something else I have been reminded about is the use of a damp cloth for handling fish. A cloth or gloves are fine to use as long as they are clean and wet. A fellow fisherman has suggested that he uses a damp cloth to lay over the fishes head as it's being measured. He believes this helps to settle the fish while it is out of the water specially the smaller fish which can be just plain crazy at times.

10) THE MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL. Please release all native freshwater fish caught from rivers and creeks. If you're after a feed head to the salt or a stocked impoundment. There are plenty to choose from. Impoundment fish are supposed to be taken from the water, it helps reduce the nutrient in the water and they are regularly replaced. Please remember to check local bag limits before heading to impoundments. Remember these fish are coming from your pocket, in the case of licence fees, or from volunteer groups. They are NOT an unlimited resource.



Figure 4: The release can be as satisfying as the capture

I'm sure there's plenty i've forgotten and i'm sure there are things that need to be corrected but this is what i've learnt in the last few years.



Figure 5: The Future of Australian Bass Fishing

Thank you to all that take the time to read this article, there are so many small things we can all do to improve our fisheries for ourselves and for future generations.

Tight lines.

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