



**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE  
FIFTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**

Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia  
12-20 August 2019

---

**Graphics for Best Handling Practices for the Safe Release of Sharks**

---

**WCPFC-SC15-2019/EB-WP-14**

**Justel-Rubio, A., Swimmer, Y. and Hutchinson, M.**

# GRAPHICS FOR BEST HANDLING PRACTICES FOR THE SAFE RELEASE OF SHARKS

Ana Justel-Rubio<sup>1</sup>, Yonat Swimmer<sup>2</sup> and Melanie Hutchinson<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*This document presents a set of figures prepared to illustrate the Best handling practices for the safe release of sharks adopted by WCPFC in 2018. Some changes to the text are also proposed with the aim of increasing its clarity, as well as to give more relevance to the use of a stretcher bed to release sharks that arrived alive on deck.*

## 1. Introduction

In December 2018, at its 15<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Commission, the WCPFC adopted Best Practices Guidelines for the Safe Release of Sharks. These guidelines had been previously discussed in several occasions since the December 2017 WCPFC14 meeting when the Commission agreed to task SC14 to:

*“develop proposed guidelines for safe release of rays and sharks and taking into account existing standards or guidelines adopted on other fora. The Commission agreed that priority should be given to the development of guidelines for safe release of silky shark and oceanic whitetip sharks.”* (WCPFC14 Summary Report at para. 331)

The Common Oceans (ABNJ) project followed a series of suggestions from the Workshop on WCPFC Bycatch Mitigation Problem-Solving held in May 2018 (WCPFC-SC14-2018/EB-WP-12) and drafted an Information Paper (WCPFC-SC14-2018/EB-IP-03) that was discussed and revised at a small group discussion during SC14 (ISG-06). SC14 adopted the draft text for the safe release guidelines for sharks and rays agreed by ISG-06 (SC14 Summary Report para. 152 and Attachment G).

The text was subsequently presented at the Fourteenth Regular Session of the Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC) meeting held between September 26 and October 2, 2018. As stated in its summary report (TCC14 Summary Report, para. 326-328):

*326. TCC14 did not raise any technical and compliance issues with Attachment G of the SC14 Summary Report concerning safe release guidelines for sharks.*

*327. TCC14 recommended to WCPFC15 that it adopt the best practice guidelines for the safe handling of sharks (Attachment G of the SC14 Summary Report).*

*328. TCC14 suggested to the Shark IWG Chair that he [...] consider the appropriate inclusions and references to paragraph 561 and Attachment G of the SC14 summary report when developing the 6th draft of the comprehensive shark CMM.*

---

<sup>1</sup> International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)

<sup>2</sup> NOAA National Marine Fisheries

Following recommendations from both SC14 and TCC14, the WCPFC at its Fifteenth Regular Commission meeting in December 2018 adopted the Best Practice Guidelines for Safe Release of Sharks (WCPFC15 Report, Para. 342 and Attachment J).

This document presents a set of figures produced to illustrate the guidelines adopted by WCPFC15, as well as some small revisions to the text.

## 2. Proposals to improve the Best Practice Guidelines for Safe Release of Sharks

A set of figures has been produced by the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) to accompany the agreed text for the Best Practice Guidelines for Safe Release of Sharks adopted in 2018 (**Appendix 1**). Some of the figures that refer to purse seine fisheries are based on already existing figures from the Poisson *et al.* (2012) “Good Practices to reduce the mortality of sharks and rays caught incidentally by tropical tuna purse seiners”. Similarly, some figures illustrating the guidelines for longline fisheries are based on illustrations from Gilman, E. (Editor). 2014.

These figures have been developed in collaboration with a group of experts in shark bycatch mitigation in tuna fisheries, some of which have experience on the implementation of these techniques at sea or have regular feedback from fishers on the plausibility of bycatch mitigation methods received at ISSF Skipper Workshops (Murua *et al.*, 2019). This type of feedback has been especially valuable in order to produce figures that accurately represent the adopted shark safe release guidelines with the aim of making them easier to understand and implement.

Following the outcomes of the discussions at ISG-06 and SC14, all “Dos” figures have been labelled as *examples* of how to follow the guidelines described in the text.

Additionally, we present a revision to the text adopted in 2018 (**Appendix 2**). This revision includes: some small editorial changes, an explicit mention of “Dos” figures to be interpreted as *examples* only, and an addition to the purse seine section to include the use of a stretcher bed as one of the methods to transport small or medium sharks that arrive alive on deck. All changes to the original text are highlighted in Appendix 2.

We expect these changes to the text will increase its clarity and reflect current knowledge on shark bycatch mitigation methods. Experts consulted during the revision of the guidelines highlighted the importance of the use of the stretcher bed as a way to increase crew’s safety and noted how the use of this type of tool is already common practice among skippers of several different fleets.

## 3. Recommendations

- That the set of figures presented in this document is added as an appendix to the guidelines text adopted by WCPFC in 2018 and that all figures illustrating “Dos” are labelled as examples.
- That the proposed editorial changes are applied to the text in order to increase its overall clarity.
- That the text is modified to include the use of a stretcher bed as one of the best practices to release sharks (small- and medium-sized) from deck.

#### 4. Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Laurent Dagorn, Jefferson Murua, Shelley Clarke and Víctor Restrepo for their expert feedback on earlier versions of the illustrations and for their suggested revisions to the guidelines text. We would like to thank collaboration from François Poisson and Eric Gilman to facilitate the use of figures developed for previous shark handling and release guides.

#### 5. References

Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Project (2018a). Report of the Workshop on WCPFC Bycatch Mitigation Problem-Solving (WCPFC-SC14-2018/EB-WP-12).

Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Project (2018b). Safe Release Guidelines for Sharks and Rays (WCPFC-SC14-2018/EB-IP-03)

Gilman, E. (Editor). 2014. Methods for Longline Fishers to Safely Handle and Release Unwanted Sharks and Rays. Luen Thai Fishing Venture, Resources Legacy Fund, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, The Safina Center. Honolulu, USA. English and Chinese. Available online: [https://sites.google.com/site/seafoodcompaniestunamanagement/home/WCPO\\_Tuna\\_Alignment\\_Group/training-materials-for-longline-fishers](https://sites.google.com/site/seafoodcompaniestunamanagement/home/WCPO_Tuna_Alignment_Group/training-materials-for-longline-fishers)

J. Murua, G. Moreno, D. Itano, M. Hall, L. Dagorn, and V. Restrepo. 2019. ISSF Skippers' Workshops Round 8. ISSF Technical Report 2019-01. International Seafood Sustainability Foundation, Washington, D.C., USA

Poisson F., Vernet A. L., Séret B., Dagorn L., 2012. Good practices to reduce the mortality of sharks and rays caught incidentally by the tropical tuna purse seiners. EU FP7 project #210496 MADE, Deliverable 6.2., 30p. Available online: <https://www.bmis-bycatch.org/references/injt2ke5>

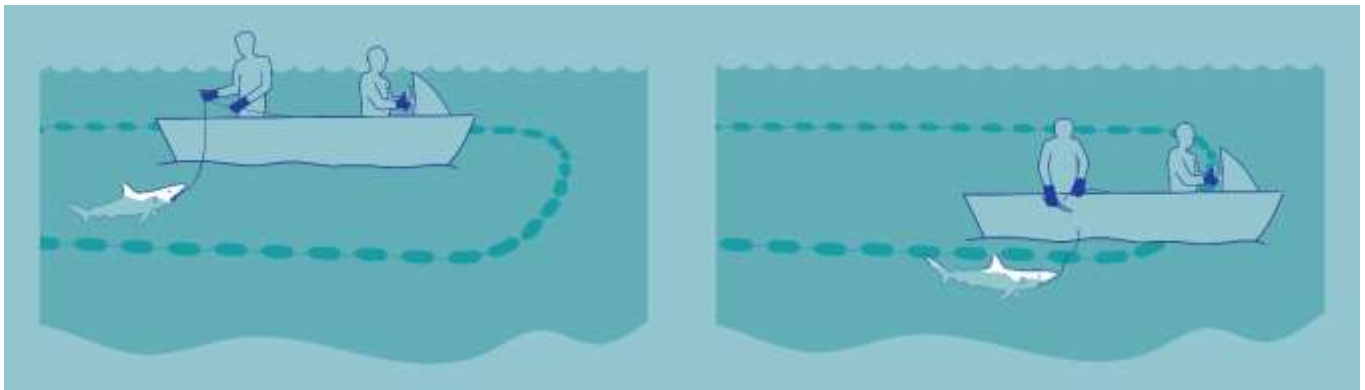
WCPFC (2018a). Fourteenth Regular Session of the Scientific Committee. Busan, South Korea. 8–16 August 2018.

WCPFC (2018b). Summary Report of the Fourteenth Regular Session of the Commission. Manila, Philippines. 3- 7 December 2017.

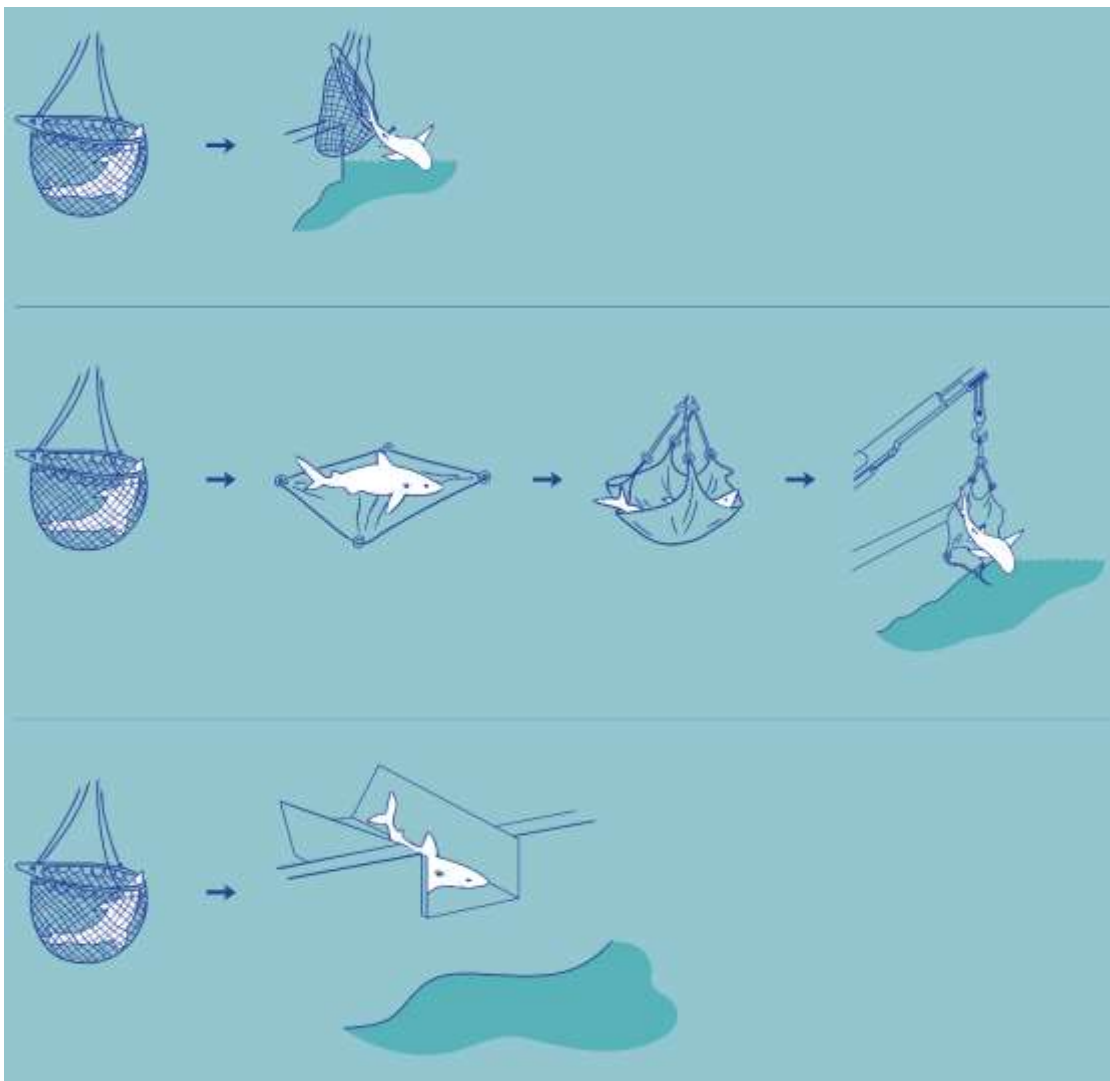
WCPFC (2018). Summary Report of the Fourteenth Regular Session of the Technical and Compliance Committee. Majuro, Republic of Marshall Islands. September 26 – October 2, 2018.

WCPFC (2019). Summary Report of the Fifteenth Regular Session of the Commission. Honolulu, Hawaii, USA. 10- 14 December 2018.

APPENDIX 1 - Figures



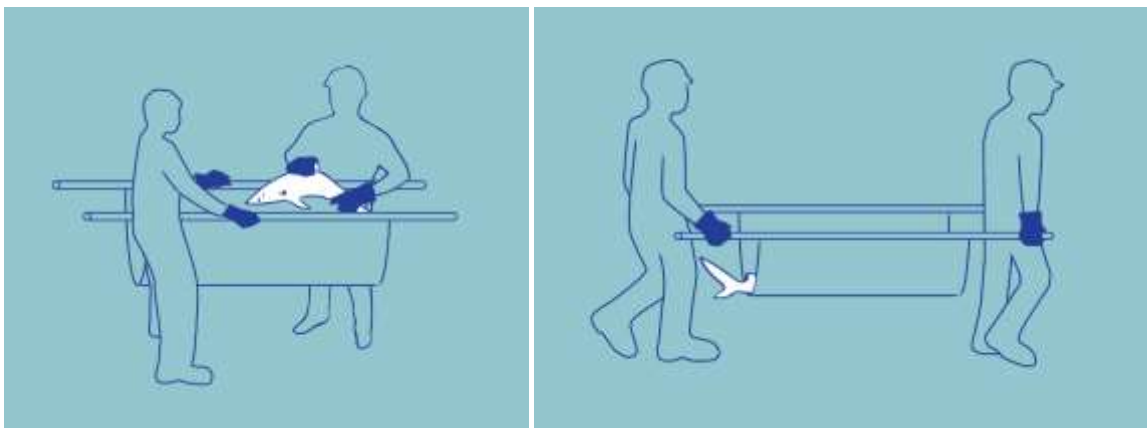
**Figure 1.** Example of crew members catching a shark inside the purse seine net with a hook and line and releasing it outside the net.



**Figure 2.** Examples of techniques to release medium or large sharks directly from the brailer to sea (top figure), to a purpose-built large-mesh cargo net or canvas sling, then to sea (middle figure) or to a metal ramp that connects to an opening on the top deck railing (bottom figure).



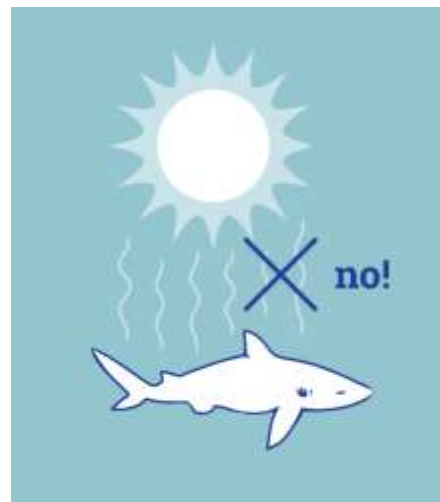
**Figure 3.** Examples of techniques to handle on deck and release small sharks by either one or two crew members.



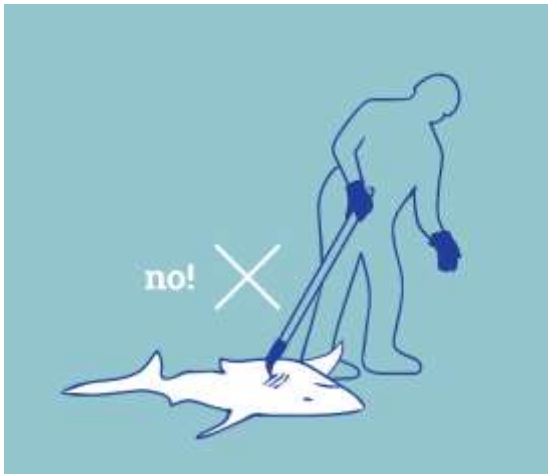
**Figure 4.** Example of use of a stretcher bed to handle and transport sharks that were brought on deck.



**Figure 5.** Example of crew member cutting the net away from a shark that was brought onboard entangled in netting.



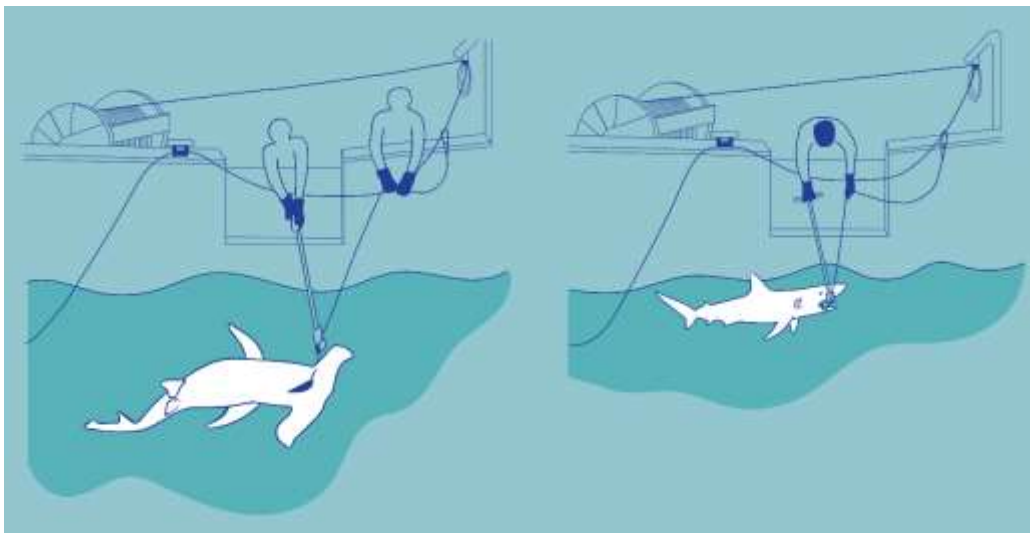
**Figure 6.** Release sharks to the sea as soon as possible.



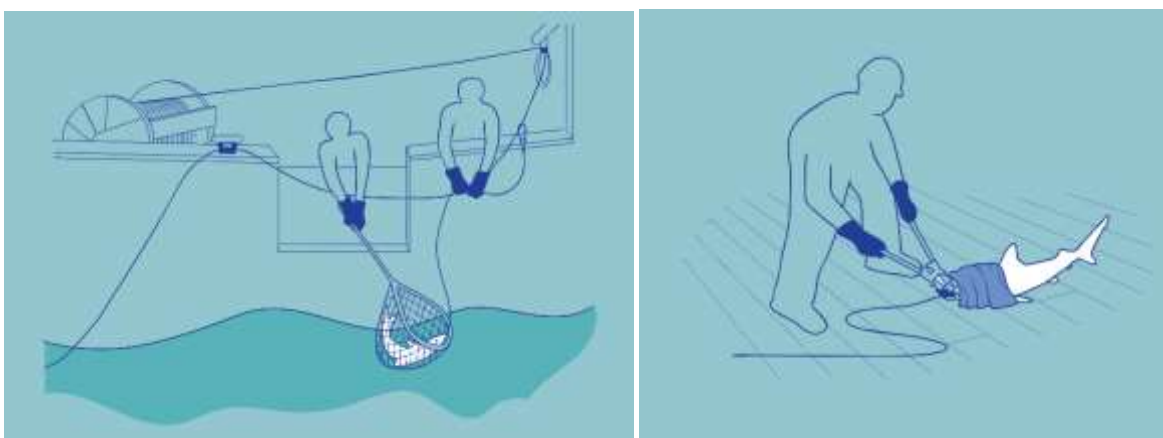
**Figure 7.** Do not cut or punch holes through the shark's body. Do not gaff a shark.



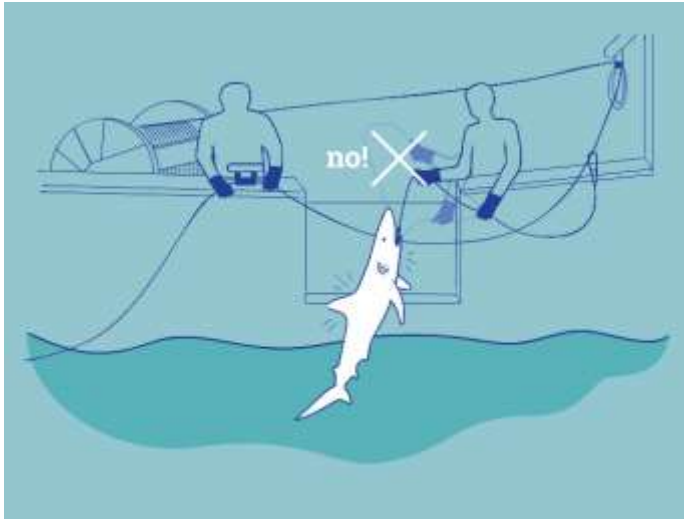
**Figure 8.** Do not insert hands into the gill slits.



**Figure 9.** Example techniques to release sharks while they are in the water by using a long-handled line cutter to cut the gear as close to the hook as possible (left) or by using a long-handled dehooker to remove the hook (right).



**Figure 10.** Example of the use of a dip net to bring the shark on board (left) and example of the use of a bolt cutter to remove the hook.



**Figure 11.** Do not strike a shark against any surface to remove the animal from the line.



**Figure 12.** Do not try to remove a hook by pulling sharply on the branchline.



---

## SHARK SAFE RELEASE GUIDELINES

---

### BEST HANDLING PRACTICES FOR THE SAFE RELEASE OF SHARKS (OTHER THAN WHALE SHARKS AND MANTAS/MOBULIDS)<sup>3</sup>

The following are recommended non-binding guidelines of best handling practices of sharks for both purse seine and longline fisheries:

**Safety First:** These guidelines should be considered in light of safety and practicability for crew. Crew safety should always come first. Crew should wear suitable gloves and avoid working around the jaws of sharks.

For all gear types, keep animals in the water if possible. If necessary to land on deck, minimize time and release shark to the water as soon as possible.

#### Purse Seine

**Do's** (All Figures illustrating "Dos" are to be interpreted as examples only ~~make sure that "do" graphics are clearly labelled as examples only~~):

If in purse seine net:

- Release sharks while they are still free-swimming whenever possible (e.g. back down procedure, submerging corks, cutting net)
- For sharks that cannot be released from the purse seine net, consider removing them using a hook and line (Fig. 1).

If in brail or on deck:

- For sharks that are too large to be lifted safely by hand out of the brailer, it is preferable they are released using a purpose-built large-mesh cargo net or canvas sling or similar device<sup>4</sup>. If the vessel layout allows, these sharks could also be released by emptying the brail directly on a ramp held up at an angle that connects to an opening on the top deck railing, without need to be lifted or handled by the crew (Fig. 2).
- Generally, small sharks are fragile and need to be handled very carefully. If this can be done safely, it is best to handle and release them with two people, or one person using both hands (Fig. 3). Small or medium sharks can be transported safely on deck by two crew members using a stretcher bed (Fig. 4).
- When entangled in netting, if safe to do so carefully cut the net away from the animal and release to the sea as quickly as possible with no netting attached (Fig. 5).

**Don'ts** (~~graphics are useful here~~):

- Return sharks to the sea as soon as possible. Do not wait until hauling is finished to release sharks (Fig. 6). ~~Return them to the sea as soon as possible.~~
- Do not cut or punch holes through the shark's body (Fig. 7).

---

<sup>3</sup> These guidelines are appropriate for live individuals of shark species to be released under no-retention policies as well as any other live sharks to be released voluntarily.

<sup>4</sup> As recommended in document SC8-EB-IP-12 (Poisson et al. 2012)

- Do not gaff or kick a shark and do not insert hands into the gill slits (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8).

### Longline

**Do's** (All Figures illustrating "Dos" are to be interpreted as examples only ~~make sure that "do" graphics are clearly labelled as examples only~~):

- The preference is to release all sharks while they are still in the water, if possible. Use a dehooker to remove the hook or a long-handled line cutter to cut the gear as close to the hook as possible (ideally leaving less than 0.5 meters of line attached to the animal) (Fig. 9).
- If de-hooking in the water proves to be difficult, and the shark is small enough to be accommodated in a dip net, bring it on board and remove as much gear as possible by using a dehooker. If hooks are embedded, either cut the hook with bolt cutters or cut the line at the hook and gently return the animal to the sea (Fig. 10).
- For all sharks that are brought on deck, minimize time before releasing to the water (Fig. 6).

**Don'ts** (~~graphics are useful here~~):

- Do not strike a shark against any surface to remove the animal from the line (Fig. 11).
- Do not attempt to dislodge a hook that is deeply ingested and not visible.
- Do not try to remove a hook by pulling sharply on the branchline (Fig. 12).
- Do not cut the tail or any other body part.
- Do not gaff or ~~drag~~, kick ~~or pull~~ a shark, and do not insert hands into the gill slits (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8).

Additional recommendation:

Knowing that any fishing operation may catch sharks, several tools can be prepared in advance (e.g. canvas or net slings or stretchers for carrying or lifting, large mesh net or grid to cover hatches/hoppers in purse seine fisheries, long handled cutters and de-hookers in longline fisheries).