

Sea Turtle Handling/Release Guidelines:

Quick Reference for

Hook and Line Fisheries



Guidelines for all turtles

- Scan as far as possible to sight turtles in advance and reduce likelihood of jerking turtles out of the water.
- Longline Vessels: Do not get ahead of the line while picking up gear. This reduces the chance of fouling or running over gear and turtle.

Upon sighting a turtle:

- ◆ Slow vessel and line reel speed
- ◆ Adjust direction of the vessel to move toward turtle
- ◆ Minimize tension on the line with the turtle

Holding the line with the turtle on it, continue to move toward the turtle at a slow speed. **STOP VESSEL** and **PUT IN NEUTRAL** once turtle is brought alongside.

- Slowly retrieve line with turtle, keeping a gentle, consistent tension on the line. Avoid tugging or yanking line quickly. **DO NOT USE GAFFS OR SHARP OBJECTS** in direct contact with the turtle to retrieve it; a gaff may be used only to control the line during line removal.
- Ensure that enough slack is left in the line to keep turtle near the vessel, yet in water, until it can be determined whether or not it is possible to release turtle in the water, or safely bring it aboard.
- If turtle can be safely brought aboard and vessel is equipped with “cut-out doors,” use this cut-out area to bring turtles aboard to minimize the distance from the water.
- Resuscitate comatose boated turtles as needed, holding them for up to 24 hours (keep moist and in the shade) if necessary.
- More information on releasing sea turtles is available in the *Careful Release Protocols for Sea Turtle Release with Minimal Injury* and on the web at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov>

Guidelines for turtles not boated

- Control turtle by maintaining pressure on line, or preferably, with a type of turtle tether, and bring the turtle as close to the vessel as possible. **DO NOT** lift turtles clear of the water.
- If entangled and not hooked, use dehooking tools to secure unattached hooks. Use clippers to cut the line. **DO NOT** leave line attached.
- If hooked and entangled, remove the hook first. Then, after the hook is removed, proceed to remove all line.
- All externally embedded hooks should be removed. If hook removal is not possible, cut the line at the eye of the hook (or as close as possible).
- Internal hooks should be removed only if an internal dehooker is being used. Do not attempt to remove hook if the hook has been swallowed beyond where the insertion point of the barb is visible, or when it appears that the hook removal will cause further injury. Remove as much of the line and/or hook as possible.

Guidelines for boated turtles

- If possible, bring turtle on board using a suitable dip net or other approved lifting device. Support turtle on a cushioned surface, such as a tire, while onboard.

DO NOT LIFT THE TURTLE OUT OF THE WATER USING THE LINE, GAFF, OR OTHER SHARP OBJECTS

- Remove all externally embedded hooks.
- Internal hooks should be removed when the insertion point of the barb is clearly visible and only if an approved internal dehooker is being used. Do not remove the hooks that have been swallowed when the insertion point is not visible, or when it appears hook removal will cause further damage (e.g., in the brain case or glottis). Remove as much of the line and/or hook as possible.

Stop!

To release turtle (1) **STOP VESSEL** and place in neutral; (2) Ease turtle gently into the water, head first, through cut-out door if so equipped; and (3) Observe that turtle is safely away from the vessel before engaging the propeller and continuing operations.

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