

# Flathead Survival

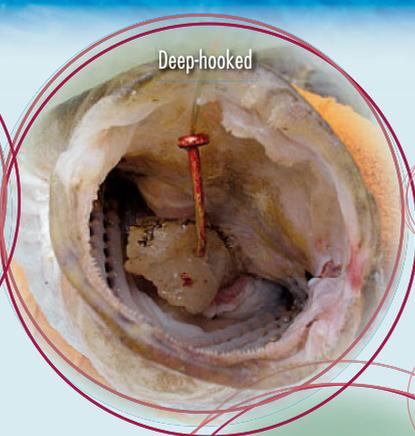
## Do released flathead survive?

Due to size and bag limits many flathead are released by recreational anglers, but until recently little was known about how many of these fish survive.

The Tasmanian Aquaculture and Fisheries Institute investigated factors influencing survival of flathead caught by baited hooks. In collaboration with volunteer angler organisations this has led to the development of approaches that will maximise the survival of released flathead.

# Research findings

Hooking damage is the most significant factor relating to whether flathead survive – survival is lowest for fish hooked in the gills or gut (deep-hooked). Additionally, fish that are bleeding stand a reduced chance of survival. Overall, however, flathead are robust and, if hooked in the lip or mouth (shallow-hooked), have a very good chance of survival if released.



## Bait fishing for flathead

A range of hook types and sizes, including "J" and "Suicide" hooks are commonly used when bait fishing for flathead. Circle hooks represent an alternative to traditional hook types, and are gaining popularity in Australia for a range of species.

## Circle hooks

Our research shows that circle hooks are just as likely to catch flathead as the more commonly used hook types but, importantly, are far less likely to deep-hook fish.

Circle hooks are designed in such a way that fish hook themselves and are less prone to being swallowed than more commonly used hook types. Using circle hooks does require an adjustment to fishing practices in that you do not need to strike on the bite.



# What can you do to increase survival of released fish?

Switching to circle hooks can increase the likelihood of the fish you release surviving since deep-hooking rates are extremely low, thus contributing to the health and sustainability of the flathead fishery.

For traditional hook types try to keep the line tight as this makes it less likely that fish will swallow the hook.



## Deep-hooked fish

If the flathead is gut-hooked, cut the line and leave the hook in place. Attempts to remove the hook may cause considerable damage to the fish. Our research shows that the likelihood that a fish will survive increases if the hook is not removed, with some fish able to expel hooks within a short period.



## Handling fish

Use a damp towel, cloth and/or gloves when handling fish as this helps protect the mucous layer on the fishes skin, and reduces the chance of injuring yourself on the spines.

Use a de-hooker, pliers or fishgrip when removing hooks.

Release fish as soon as possible after capture.

