

# What is barotrauma?

When a fish is brought up from deep water the rapid change in pressure causes the gases in the fish's body to expand. This results in a range of injuries that will most likely be fatal to the fish, and is known as barotrauma.

## Which fish?

Many reef fish species are susceptible to the effects of barotrauma. Black jewfish and golden snapper in particular, are highly vulnerable.

## What injuries?

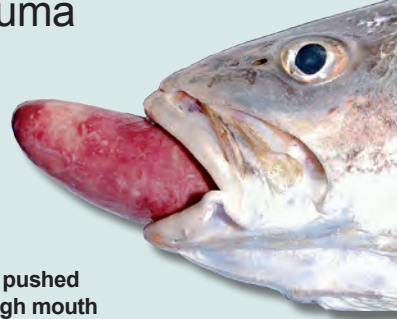
Fish suffering barotrauma may show symptoms such as the stomach pushed out through the mouth, bulging eyes, bloating in the stomach and protruding intestines.

Even fish not showing visible signs of barotrauma may have suffered fatal internal injuries such as a ruptured swim bladder, damaged organs, internal bleeding and blood clotting.

## What can I do?

- Don't target reef fish for catch and release when fishing in a depth of 10 metres or more.
- Once you have caught enough for your immediate needs or have reached your possession limit (whichever comes first) stop fishing or change locations and target species less susceptible to barotrauma (e.g. barramundi or trevally).
- Keep the reef fish you catch and utilise them (within possession limits) as released fish are unlikely to survive.
- Change locations if you keep catching juvenile or unwanted fish.

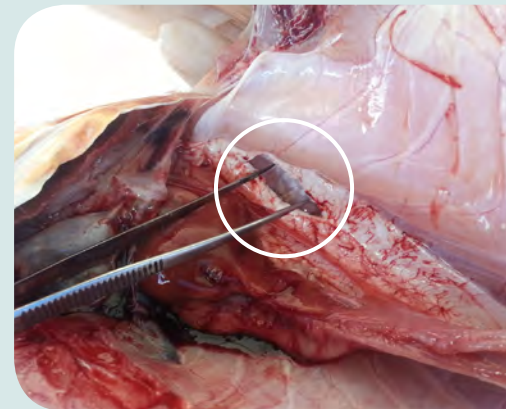
Common injuries associated with barotrauma



Stomach pushed out through mouth  
(do not pierce)



Bloated stomach and bulging eyes



Ruptured swim bladder



Intestines protruding

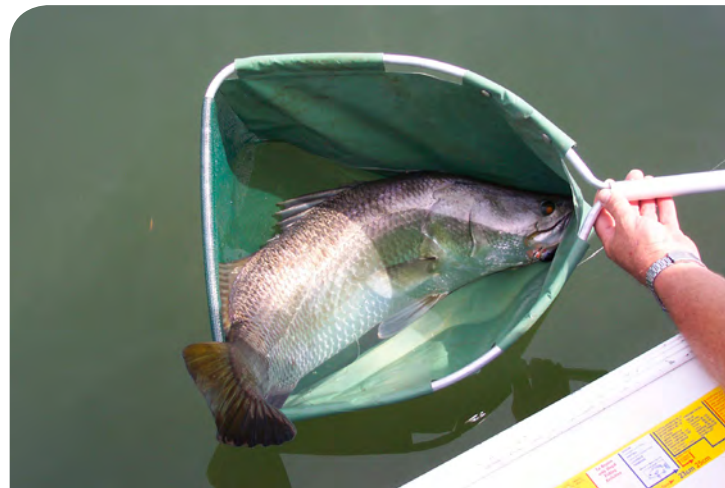


## Best practice for handling and releasing fish

**An increasing number of recreationally caught fish are now released after capture. In the last recreational fishing survey it was estimated that nearly 60% of all fish caught in the NT were released. It is therefore responsible practice to ensure that all fish released have the best chance of survival.**

**The following points should be observed when releasing fish:**

- Minimise capture time; use only tackle that is appropriate for the size and species of fish being targeted.
- Minimising handling time out of the water (leave the fish in the water in the landing net until you are ready for a photo).
- Use fish-friendly knotless landing nets to minimise injuries such as skin abrasions, fin damage and protective slime loss.
- When holding a fish support its weight horizontally with both hands (don't hold a fish vertically by its mouth or gills).
- Don't lay a fish which is to be released on a hot surface or allow it to thrash around on a boat's deck.
- If possible release fish into bank side cover or snags to provide protection while they recover.
- When bait fishing use large non-offset circle hooks (minimum 5/0) to reduce the capture of smaller fish and deeply hooked fish.
- When a fish is deeply hooked cut the line close to the mouth and leave the hook in place.
- The use of barbless hooks helps when releasing fish and reduces the damage caused.
- Due to the effects of barotrauma, reef fish shouldn't be targeted for catch and release in water deeper than 10 m.



**Remember, just because you don't catch the fish you want, you shouldn't treat them differently to more desirable species**