

Reef Fishing Best Practice



Reef fish are feeling the pressure

Many reef fish species are highly susceptible to overfishing because they can take a long time to reach reproductive age, aggregate in large schools making them easy to catch, and suffer from barotrauma and low post-release survival.

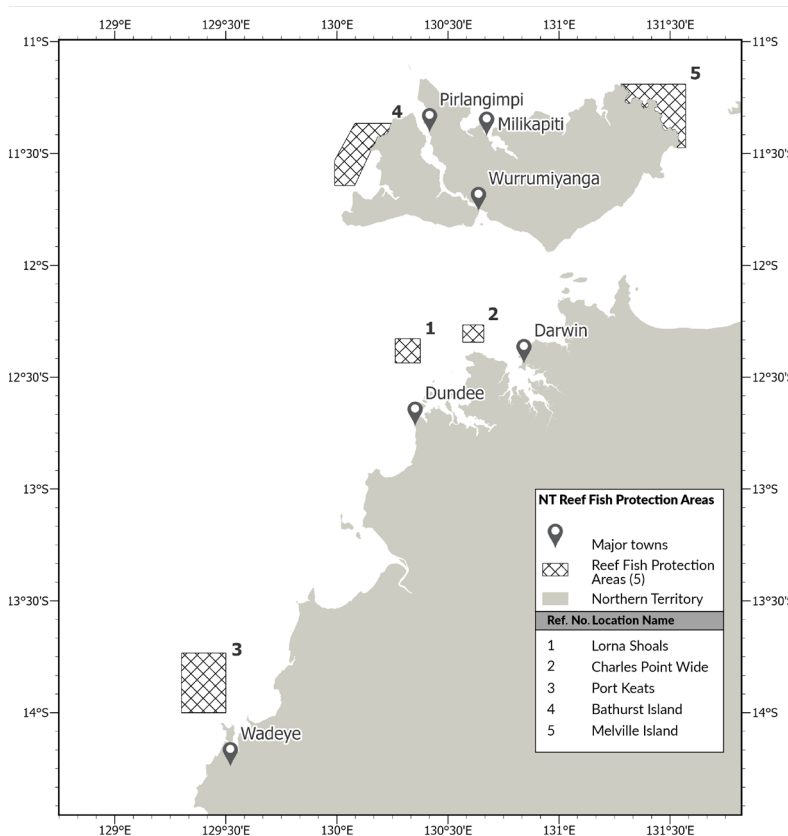
More people are living in and visiting the greater Darwin area specifically to enjoy the great outdoors and fishing lifestyle. Improved technology including high resolution sounders and GPS anchoring make it easier than ever to target the best spots. We need to be careful what we take and how, so we can keep fish for the future.

Every fisher can support the recovery and sustainability of coastal reef fish by following these simple guidelines.



Reef fish with barotrauma injuries

Help stocks recover in Reef Fish Protection Areas



Five Reef Fish Protection Areas have been in place in the Greater Darwin Region since 2015.

These Reef Fish Protection Areas were created to protect known reef fish aggregation sites, reduce the impacts of barotrauma, and as a proactive measure to protect the more pristine reef fish stocks in the region.

Locations

1. Lorna Shoals
2. Charles Point Wide
3. Port Keats
4. Bathurst Island
5. Melville Island

Boundary coordinates for the Reef Fish Protection Areas can be found online using this QR code:



It is a serious offence to fish in any Reef Fish Protection Area, or be in possession of any fish or fishing gear in a Reef Fish Protection Area. Criminal convictions with heavy penalties as well as the seizure and forfeiture of all your equipment can apply.

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Prevent Barotrauma

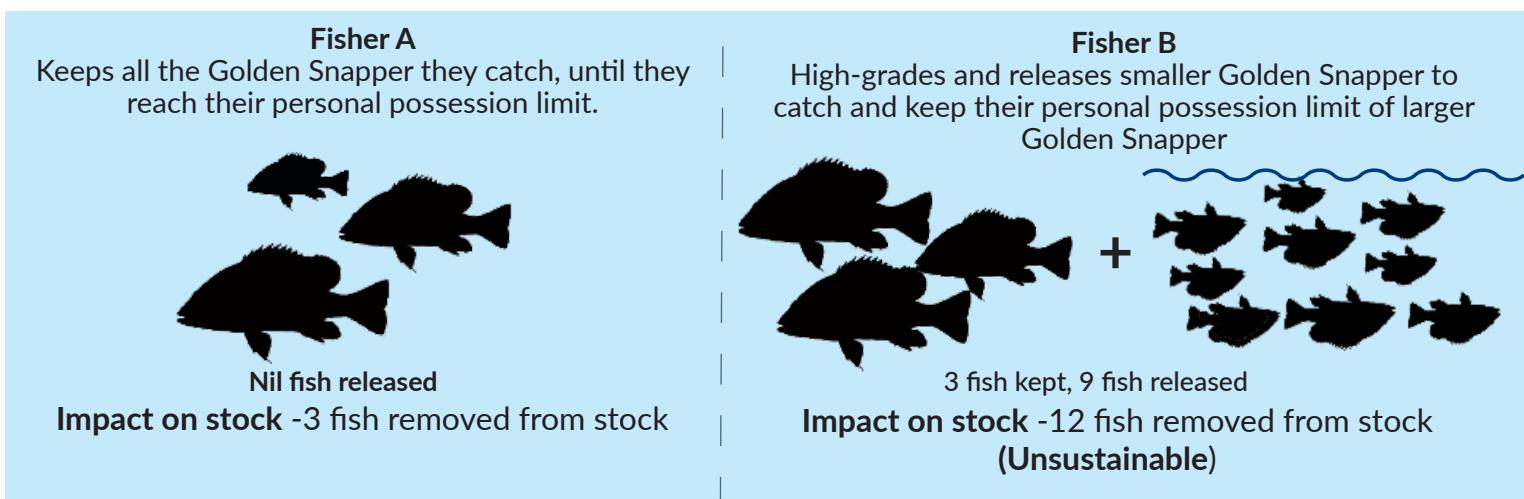
When a fish is caught at depth and quickly brought to the surface, the gases within its body expand, causing various injuries. Not all symptoms of barotrauma are immediately visible; fish may seem to be released successfully, but they can die minutes, hours, or even days later.

Catching and releasing unwanted small reef fish may seem like the right thing to do. Unfortunately, when caught in water greater than 10m deep, many reef fish species will die after release from barotrauma or predation. Even if your reef fish doesn't have obvious barotrauma signs, if you are fishing in more than 10m of water, assume they won't survive release.

Keep what you catch first

Continuing to fish after reaching your possession limit and discarding a smaller fish for a larger one is known as "high-grading." Because of low survival rates, this practice removes more fish from the fishery, putting pressure on our fish stocks. If you choose not to return a fish to the water immediately, you are considered to have taken that fish, and it counts towards your possession limit.

Below is an example of the best practice of keeping what you catch until you meet the possession limit vs unsustainable catch and release and high grading.



Target other species

Barramundi and pelagics like mackerels, tuna and queenfish are fun to catch and great to eat. Targeting them helps give reef fish species a break so future generations can enjoy them. Tomorrow's fishing starts TODAY!

Follow best practices - Sustainable reef fishing guidelines

- Know your location - Fishing in Reef Fish Protection Areas is illegal and penalties apply.
- Reef fish are not suitable for catch and release in water deeper than 10m.
- Keep any legal sized reef fish you catch within possession and boat limits.
- Stop fishing when you have caught enough for a feed or reached your limit – even one at-risk species over the limit is considered a commercial quantity.
- If fishing in shallow water (less than 10m deep) handle fish that need to be released carefully and quickly.
- If sharks have moved in and are starting to take fish, change fishing locations.
- Use non-offset circle hooks to reduce injuries to reef fish you want to release, and use bigger hooks to avoid catching small unwanted fish.