

Contrary to some reports, there are no new saltwater fish handling regulations in Florida. However, the FWC has recently been reminding anglers about existing rules that are meant to protect fish when they can't be taken.

Fish must be immediately released for several reasons. For example, there is no allowable harvest of [goliath grouper and Nassau grouper](#) in Florida. [Tarpon](#) may only be taken if a special tag is clipped to the fish's lower jaw. Several species, such as snook, redfish and spotted seatrout, can be kept only at certain times and sizes.

When a fish isn't allowed to be harvested, it must immediately be returned to the water free, alive, and unharmed. However, if a fish is allowed to be taken at a certain size limit, it's okay to temporarily possess it to [measure it](#), as long as it is measured immediately after removing it from the water, and the fish is then immediately returned to the water free, alive, and unharmed if it is not a legal-size fish.

Anglers should also use common sense when releasing fish. Sometimes it's better to [safely handle a fish](#) to carefully remove the hook so it can be released, and other times it's best to cut the line as close to the hook as possible while the fish is in the water – especially if it's large or agitated.

It is okay to take a picture of a fish that is not allowed to be harvested while it's in the process of being released, but it still must be let go immediately and should not be held in lengthy poses just for the purpose of [taking the picture](#). And it is never legal to hold on to or tow a fish that is not allowed to be harvested to a place to weigh or measure it for a fishing tournament or [record](#).

The plain fact is that many of our most popular recreational fisheries are strictly [regulated](#), and because of this, many fish caught must be returned to the water. Most anglers would agree that anything we can do to [minimize the harm to those fish being released](#) will benefit the resource in the long haul.

However, we also don't want to discourage the [fun and excitement](#) of catching fish and documenting the catch, whether for records or the personal satisfaction that comes with sharing this experience with friends and family. That's why we are attempting to inform the public about safe catch and release techniques, and the harm that can be caused to fish that are handled roughly or held out of the water too long. That is the approach our [law enforcement](#) officers are taking, and only egregious cases of mishandling or unequivocal "possession" of an illegal fish would be pursued.

Florida's anglers should be proud of their conservation efforts. They have helped to restore or sustain valuable fisheries, including snook, red drum and spotted seatrout. As the number of anglers continues to grow and our coastal habitats come under increasing stress, it becomes more important than ever to release those fish that cannot be harvested in as good a condition as possible. The next angler will thank you for it.