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Fishers hooked on barotrauma model

Fishers from Tully to the Daintree are benefiting from a new hands-on model which shows how to release fish with barotrauma.

Barotrauma occurs when a fish is caught at depths of over 10 metres. As it surfaces, the fish's swim bladder swells due to the expansion of gases. Symptoms can range from a hard, swollen stomach to extreme cases where the stomach is forced out the fish's mouth. The fish's chances of survival is increased if treated before release.

Research funded by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation and completed by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries has identified the best practice for treating reef fish with barotrauma is to vent the gas from the fish's swim bladder using a clean, hollow needle.

A common desire to educate fishers about the best treatment method has resulted in a unique partnership between the region's Local Marine Advisory Committees, bait and tackle shops, Rec Fish Australia, Infofish and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

A series of lifelike fish models have been funded by Local Marine Advisory Committees to sit on bait and tackle shop counters. The shops will use the model to provide hands-on demonstrations of the correct method. A cheap venting tool for releasing the trapped gas, and a brochure produced by Infofish explaining the exact place to insert the needle will be available at the tackle shops.

GBRMMPA officer Phil Laycock, who coordinated the partnership, said there were still a lot of old wive's tales and incorrect techniques being used to try to deflate the swim bladder.

"Research shows popping the distended stomach in the fish's mouth or piercing the belly in the wrong location dramatically reduces the fish's chances of survival," Mr Laycock said.

Cairns Local Marine Advisory Committee chair Bob Rossi said the committee was pleased to be able get behind the project. "It's easy to vent a fish once you know how," he said.

"Draw an imaginary horizontal line from the top of the pectoral fin, then draw another vertical line down from the base of the fourth dorsal spine. Where the lines intersect is the perfect spot to vent the fish. It's the same for all species. However, red emperor is the only species that doesn't need this treatment."

Owner of Bransfords Tackle shop Keith Graham predicted the venting tool – a simple hypodermic needle attached to a hollow tube to allow the trapped air to escape – would "walk out the door".

“They are a must for every tackle box,” he said. “We are keeping the price below \$2 because we think this is an easy practice that everyone should take up to ensure our fish stocks remain in good shape.”

Robert Erskine of Erskines Tackle World said: “It’s great to see government and the recreational fishing community working together on this. If it’s successful in Far North Queensland we’d like to see it roll out across the state.”

The barotrauma project will be officially launched at the Norship Marine Light Tackle Slam at Yorkey’s Knob Boat and Fishing Club on Friday August 22.

Ends

Participating Tackle shops:

Mossman Bait and Tackle

Innisfail Tackle and Sports

Bransfords Tackle shop

Cairns Tackle World

Erskines Tackle World

Tully Tackle World

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