

CHAPTER 6

FISHING ACTION

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-Consumable Supplies -Effective Fishing -Comfort and common sense -Avoiding accidents ~
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- B. WORKING THE LINES -*Deployment -Paying out the line -Gear damage -Fouling*
- C. THE STRIKE -*Spotting strikes -Circling -Drawing in the other lines*
- D. HANDLING FISH ON A FIXED LINE -*Overhand hauling -Wrapping -Releasing the line Practice*
- E. HANDLING FISH ON HANDREELS -*Attaching the brake -Avoiding injury -Winding in*
- F. BOATING THE FISH -*Fish size -Lifting and netting -Gaffing -Gaff actions -Noosing
-Unhooking*
- G. TAKING CARE OF THE CATCH -*Shading and cooling -Bleeding -Cleaning fish -Icing*

CHAPTER 6: FISHING ACTION

SECTION A: BEFORE SETTING OFF

Preparation is a vital part of the fishing trip which should not be overlooked. It is frustrating, time-wasting and often dangerous (especially when trolling long distances) to head out to sea without ensuring that the boat is in good order, or having forgotten important supplies or equipment.

Checking the Boat

Before setting out, look over the boat to ensure that no damage has occurred while it has been unattended, and that no important deck equipment has been removed. Check that the steering and electrics are operating properly, bail or pump the bilges, and generally ready the boat for use.

Onboard supplies and equipment

The equipment required will vary depending on the type of boat, the intended length of the fishing trip, the type of fishing being carried out, local fishing and geographical conditions, and local marine laws and regulations. In planning the needs of your particular vessel, remember -always prepare for unexpected difficulties. As a commercial operator regularly putting out to sea, the chances are good that one day you will have a breakdown, accident or other unpredictable problem. The consequences in personal suffering or loss of property may be serious unless you are properly prepared.

When loading gear on to the boat, stow it tidily so that important items can be found easily. It is a good idea to make a checklist of all the gear that is normally required, and to get into the habit of using it at the beginning of each trip, to ensure that everything you need is on board.

Depending on your own situation, you may need some or all of the equipment from the following groups.

CONSUMABLE SUPPLIES

Plenty of water



Fresh and
canned food

No booze

EFFECTIVE FISHING

Lines and lures



Knives and tools

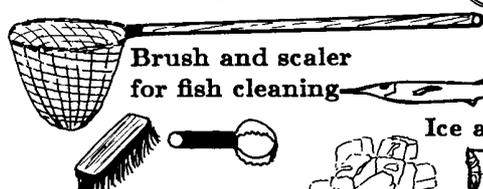


Gaffs, nets and



sharp
rope

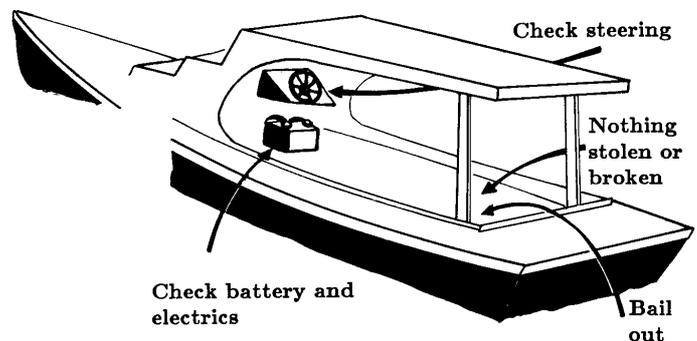
Brush and scaler
for fish cleaning



Ice and bait



CHECK THE BOAT



USE A CHECKLIST WHEN LOADING THE BOAT



Consumable Supplies

-Food: fresh and tinned food for the duration of the trip. Try to save tinned food until the end of the trip.

-Drink: take enough for everyone, plus at least two gallons of water extra. Alcoholic drinks are a bad idea on a fishing boat.

-Fuel: for short trips, carry twice as much fuel as you expect to use. For longer trips, take 50 percent extra.

Effective Fishing

-Fishing lines, rigs and lures as required. Try to make up all gear on shore, before setting off.

-Fishing tools: knives, oilstone, pliers, cutter, crimping pliers and sleeves, oil, landing nets or gaffs, shark noose, club. Other items as required. See Section 3A.

-Ice and bait as needed.

-Brush and scaler for cleaning the catch.

CHAPTER 6: FISHING ACTION

SECTION A: BEFORE SETTING OFF

Comfort and common sense

-Buckets: take two or more for bailing, cleaning and general use, and for sea anchors or signalling (see Chapter 9).

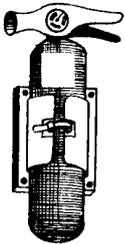
-Brush and soap for cleaning up slippery decks. -
Tarpaulin for sun and rain shelter and emergency use (see Chapter 9).

-Colman lantern, fuel and spare mantles, or torch and spare batteries for night-time lighting and signalling.

-Transistor radio: for weather forecasts.

AVOID ACCIDENTS

Fire extinguisher



Always use gloves



First aid kit



Life jackets and life buoy



Breakdowns (see Section 9C)

-Engine spares and tools: be ready to fix up minor breakdowns caused by blocked fuel lines, dirty spark plugs, damp electrical wiring, etc. Take spanners, screwdrivers, lubricant, and spare parts as appropriate for your motor.

-Anchor and anchor rope: carry suitable anchor gear to prevent drifting during a breakdown. In deep water use buckets or tarpaulin as a makeshift sea anchor (see Section 9C).

-Diving mask for checking fouled propellor or underwater damage to hull.

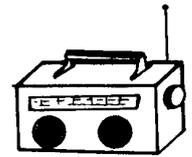
-Alternative propulsion. Carry paddles, spare small outboard motor, or sails as appropriate for your boat. A tarpaulin can be rigged as an emergency sail.

Ready the deck equipment

It is a good idea to prepare as much of the deck equipment as possible before leaving sheltered harbour or inshore waters. Rigging and staying of trolling booms, assembly of handreels, attaching mainlines to the booms, laying out of gaffs and other fishing equipment, etc., can all be done at this time.

COMFORT

Brush and soap for decks

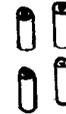


Radio - for weather reports

Buckets - cleaning and bailing



Lighting - torch and batteries...



...or colman lamp and spare mantles

Avoiding accidents (see Sections 9A and 9B)

-Gloves for handling lines and fish. (see Section 9A). -

First aid kit: should include band-aids and bandages for minor cuts and burns, antiseptic or iodine to prevent infection, aspirin or panadol for pain.

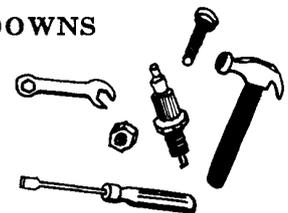
-Lifejackets or life-rings, ideally one per person on board (this is mandatory in some countries). Have one lifejacket or float in easy reach in case someone falls overboard. (See Section 9B).

-Fire extinguisher (mandatory in some countries): very important on wooden or petrol-driven boats. Make sure it is 'B-type', suitable for burning liquids.

BREAKDOWNS



Mask - to check hull and prop



Tools and spares for your engine

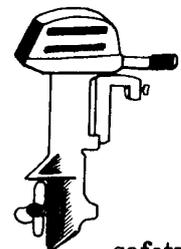
Alternative propulsion...



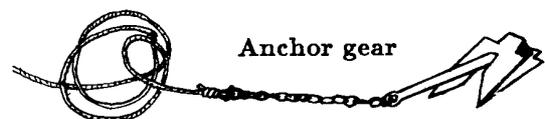
...paddles



Tarpaulin for shelter, sail or sea anchor



...safety (spare) motor



Anchor gear prevents drifting during breakdown

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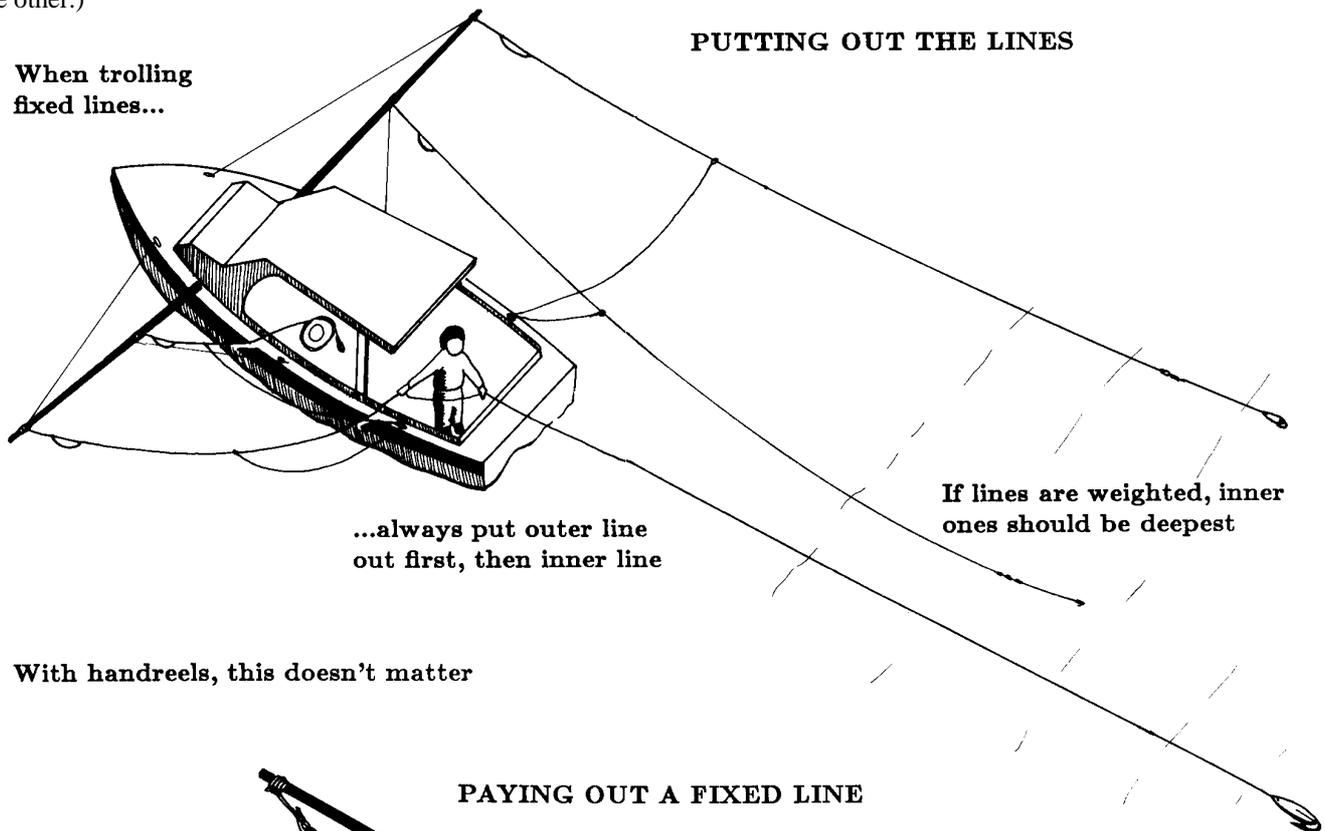
SECTION B: WORKING THE LINES

Once the boat has arrived at the fishing grounds; the lines should be got into the water quickly. Pull them in only when necessary to haul in a fish, or to change or check baits, in order to make the most of the available fishing time.

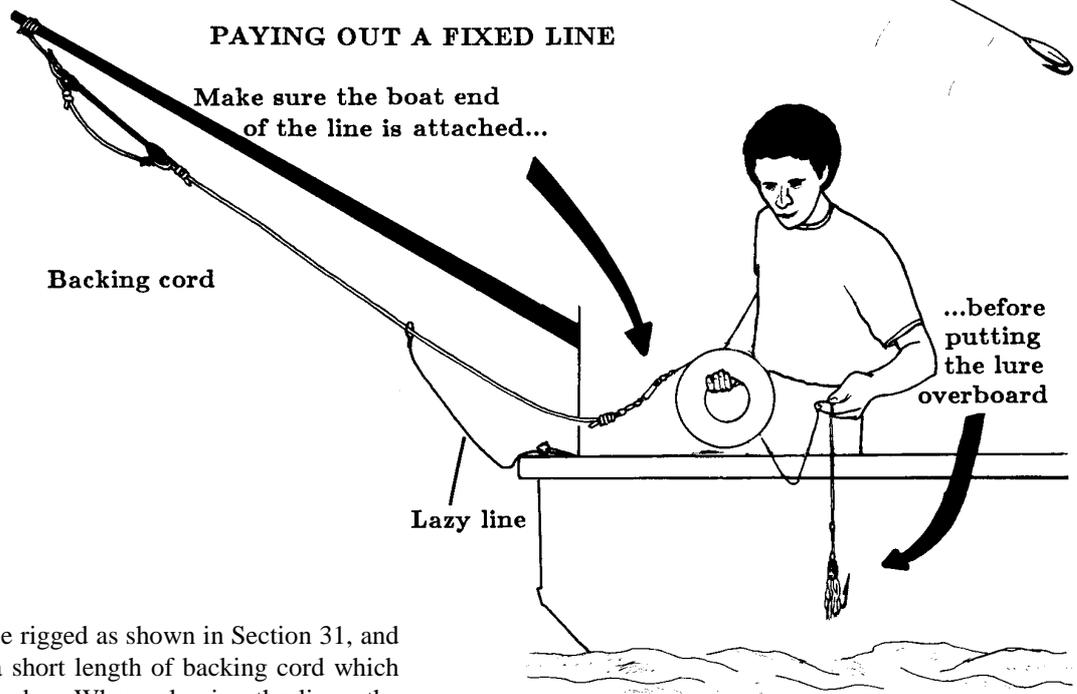
Deployment

When trolling several lines, those furthest from the boat should be paid out first. In the case of fixed lines, these outer lines should be longer, to enable them to be hauled over the inner ones when being retrieved. If weights or diving boards are being used for deep or sub-surface trolling, the inner lines should be arranged to fish deepest, and the outer ones should be less heavily weighted so as to troll closer to the surface. (This does not apply in the case of handreels, since the lines are not hauled one over the other.)

**When trolling
fixed lines...**



With handreels, this doesn't matter



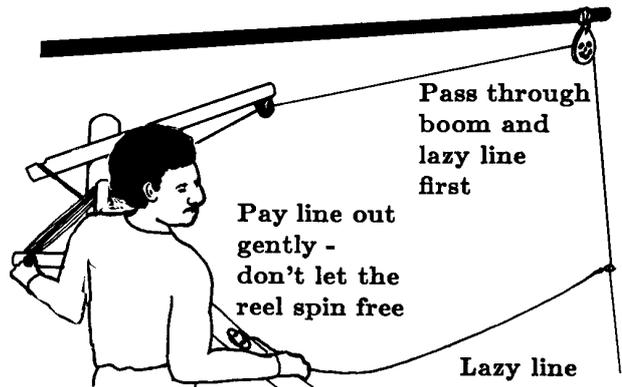
Paying out the line

Fixed lines should be rigged as shown in Section 31, and attached to the boat by a short length of backing cord which incorporates a shock absorber. When releasing the lines, the mainline should be clipped or tied in to the backing before any of the line is released. The bait or lure is then dropped into the water, where its weight will pull first the trace, and then the mainline, overboard.

With handreels, the line should be paid out by slow unwinding from the reel. The reel should not be allowed to spin freely, as this can cause the line to over-run and wrap around the shaft or handle, where it may subsequently be cut, crushed, or overstretched.

When putting a lure in the water, drop or lower it gently over the side of the boat. Do not throw it out, as this may tangle the lure with the line, or tear a natural bait from its hook. Remember to put on the lazy line (see Section 3N) before you start.

PAYING OUT LINE FROM A HAND REEL

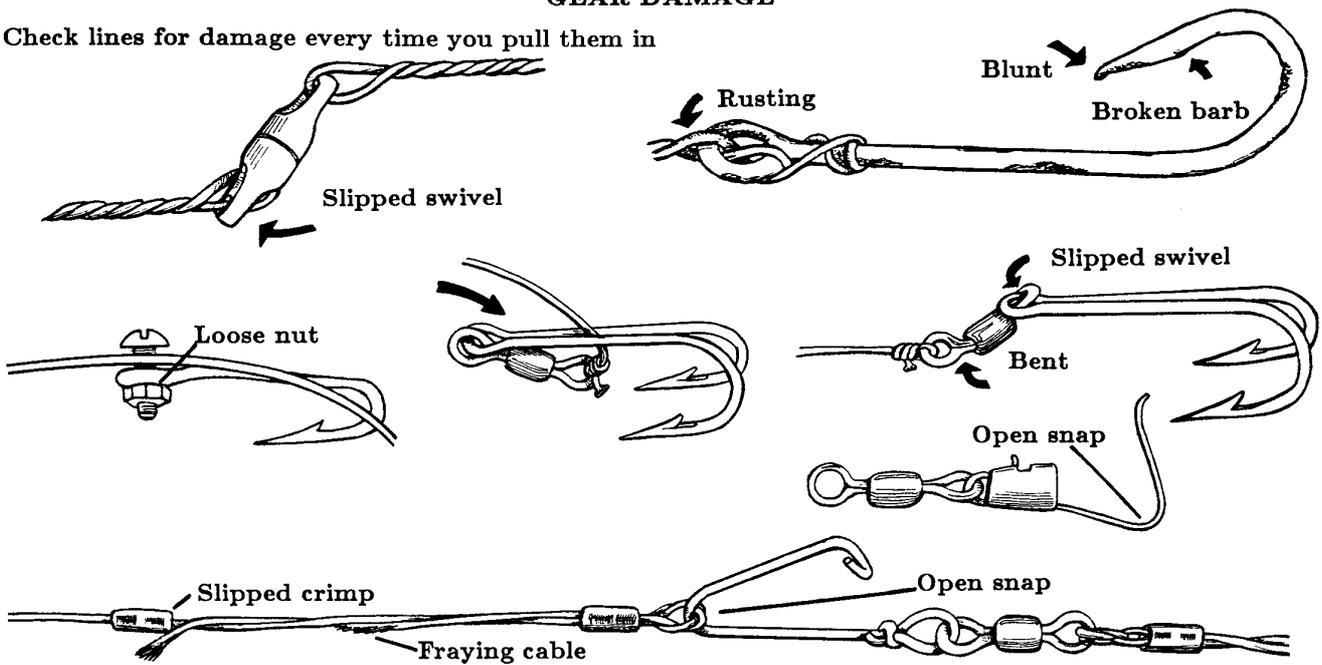


Gear damage

Before the bait or lure goes into the water, check the hooks and trace for any damage which could cause the loss of a fish. In particular make sure that the hooks are sharp and not bent out of shape. Check any knots or sleeves to ensure they are not slipping or coming loose. Look over the trace for wear, rust, fraying, or bad kinks or bends. If you find damage, decide whether you think the gear may break if the next fish is a big one. If you do, or you are in doubt, replace the gear with a new rig, and repair the old one when you get back to shore.

GEAR DAMAGE

Check lines for damage every time you pull them in



FOULING

Check lures and baits often...



Fouling

Check lures and baits regularly for fouling, especially if there is a lot of weed or other debris in the water. If the fish are not biting, change lures regularly until you hit on something that works.

The way in which to respond to a strike is discussed in the next section (6C). Techniques for bringing in lines, either with or without fish on them, are discussed in sections 6D and 6E.

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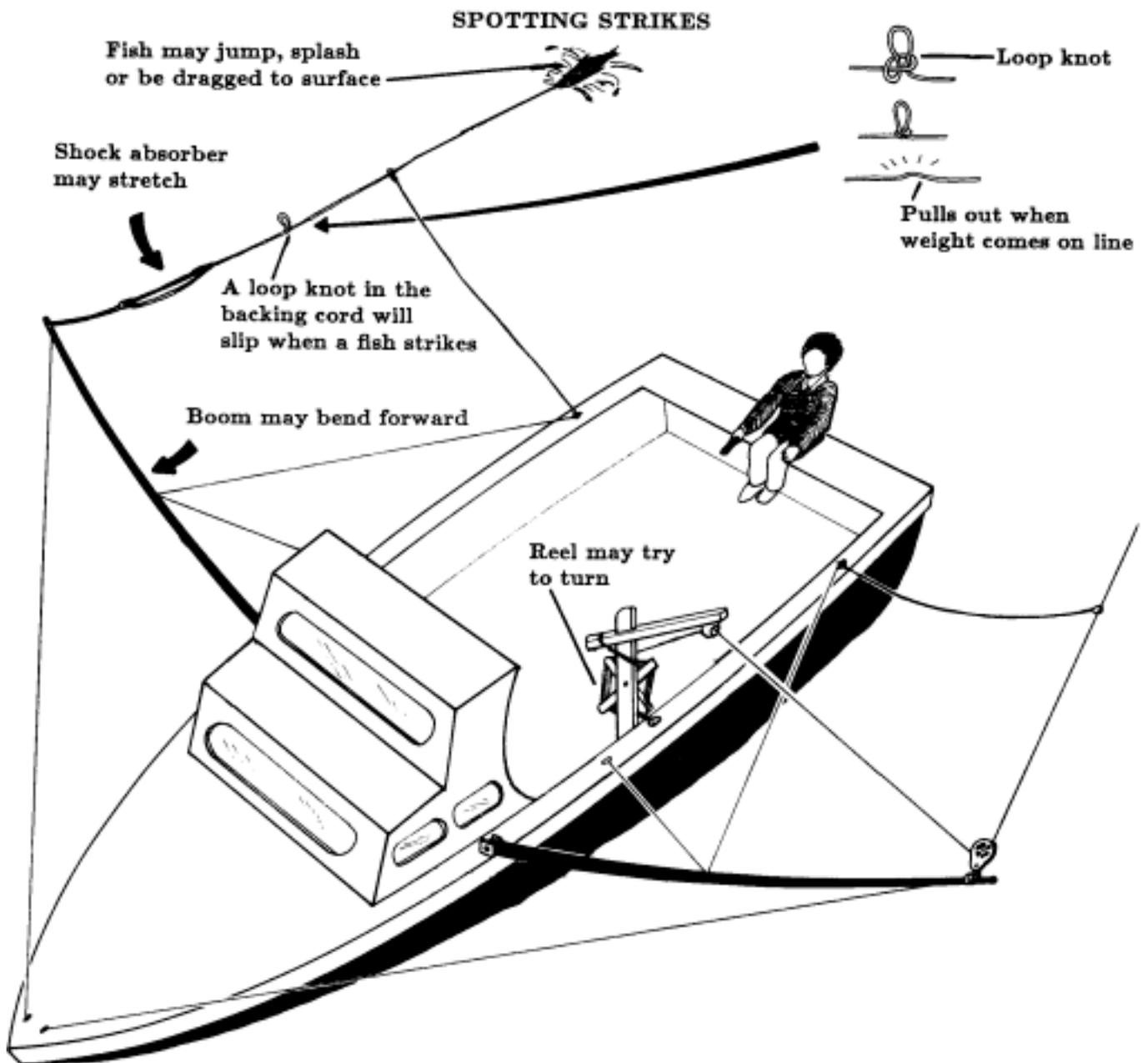
SECTION C: THE STRIKE

The strike is the point at which the fish attacks the lure or bait, and, hopefully, becomes hooked.

Spotting strikes

Strikes are not always easy to detect, especially with smaller fish, so the fisherman has to keep a constant eye on his gear. On fixed lines, the rubber shock absorber will stretch, a little or a lot depending on the size of the fish. On a handreel, the rubber brake strap will stretch, and the reel may spin if the fish is a big one. If the lines are trolled from booms, the boom may bend, although if it is properly stayed the bending may not be very great. In some cases, the fish may swim or be pulled to the surface, and may be visible splashing behind the boat.

To help them spot strikes, some fishermen tie a loop knot in the backing cord. A pull on the line makes the knot slip and disappear. This technique is handy when trolling baits. If the knot is gone but no hookup. The bait should be checked straight away as it is probably damaged.

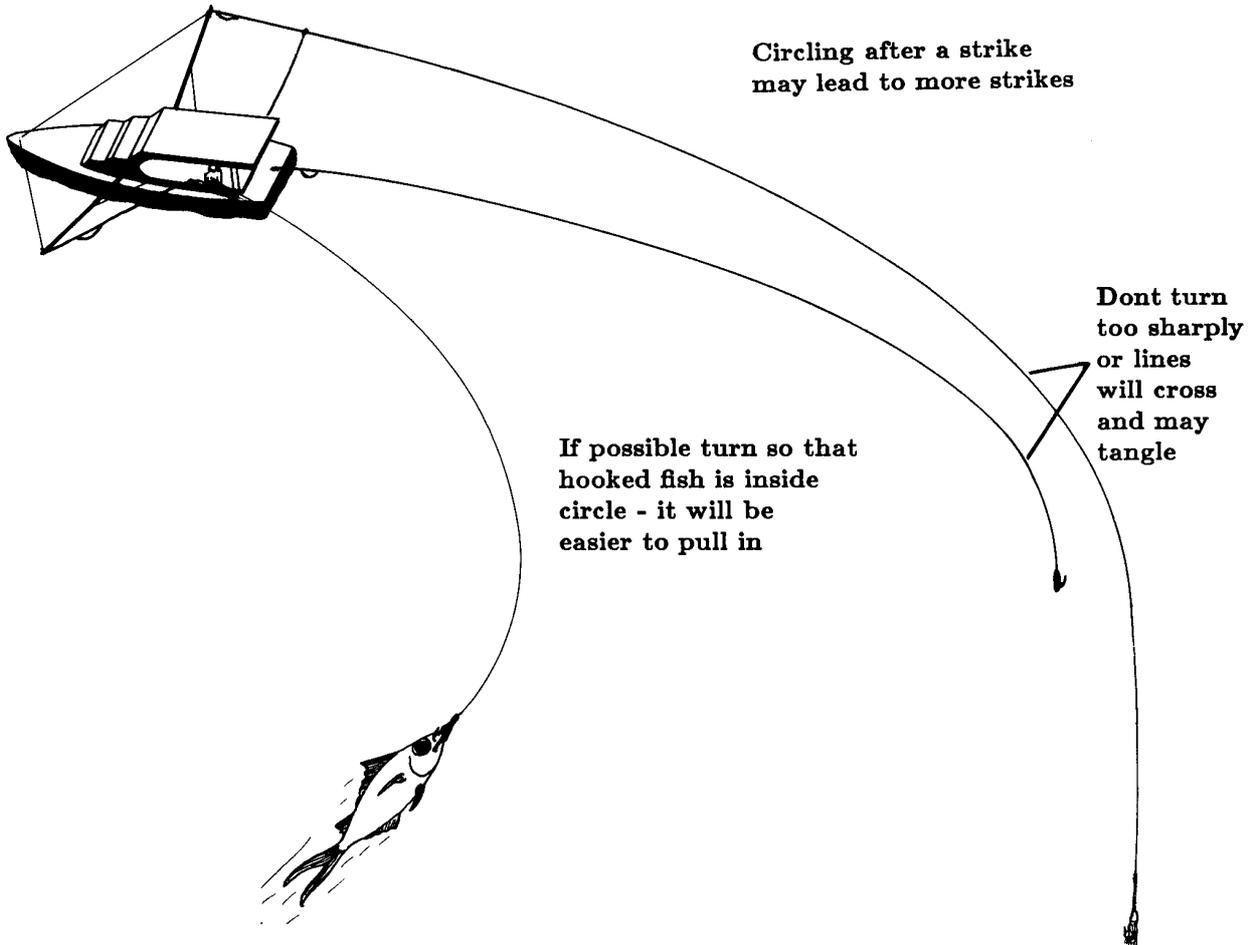


When a strike occurs it may be followed by one or more further strikes. Many fish species are found in groups, so while the first job after spotting a strike is to get the fish into the boat, it is also important to try to encourage more strikes.

Circling

One way in which you can encourage more strikes is to steer the boat into a large-diameter circle. If possible, the hooked fish should be on the inside of the circle, although sea conditions or nearby reefs may not allow this. Circling in this way takes the lures back over the location of the first strike, and, if the fish is on the inside, makes it easier to haul in the line.

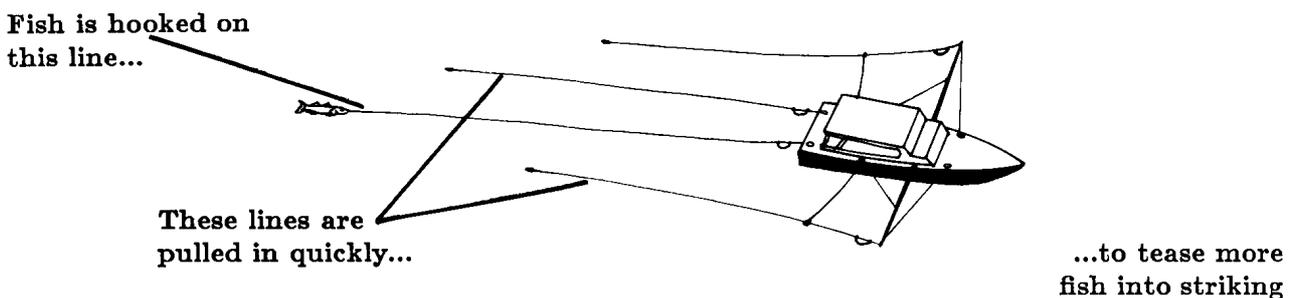
CIRCLING



Drawing in the other lines

Another way to encourage additional strikes is to quickly bring in the other trolling lines as soon as the first strike happens. The irregular motion of the lures as they are hauled in seems to excite more fish into attacking them. Pulling in the lines also reduces the chances of tangling if the first fish hooked decides to swim across them. If there are enough crew on board, the other lines can be repeatedly pulled in and let out again to tease other fish into striking.

DRAWING IN THE OTHER LINES



The techniques of handling hooked fish on fixed lines are described in the next section (6D). Handling fish using handreels is discussed in Section 6E.

CHAPTER 6: FISHING ACTION

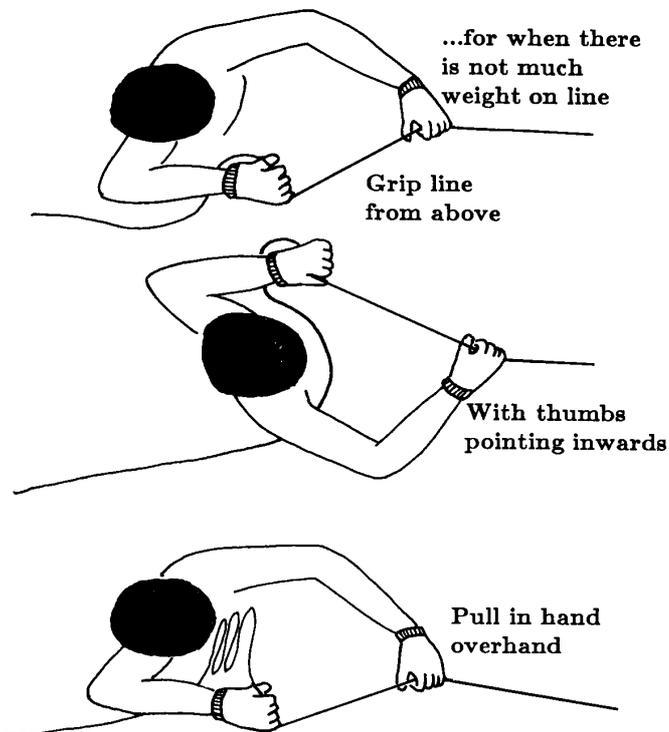
SECTION D: HANDLING FISH ON FIXED LINES

Fixed lines should be rigged as shown in Section 31, and attached to the boat by a short length of backing cord which incorporates a shock absorber. If the line is fixed onto a trolling boom, then a lazy line should also be attached to the backing cord.



OVERHAND HAULING

Overhand hauling...



Wrapping

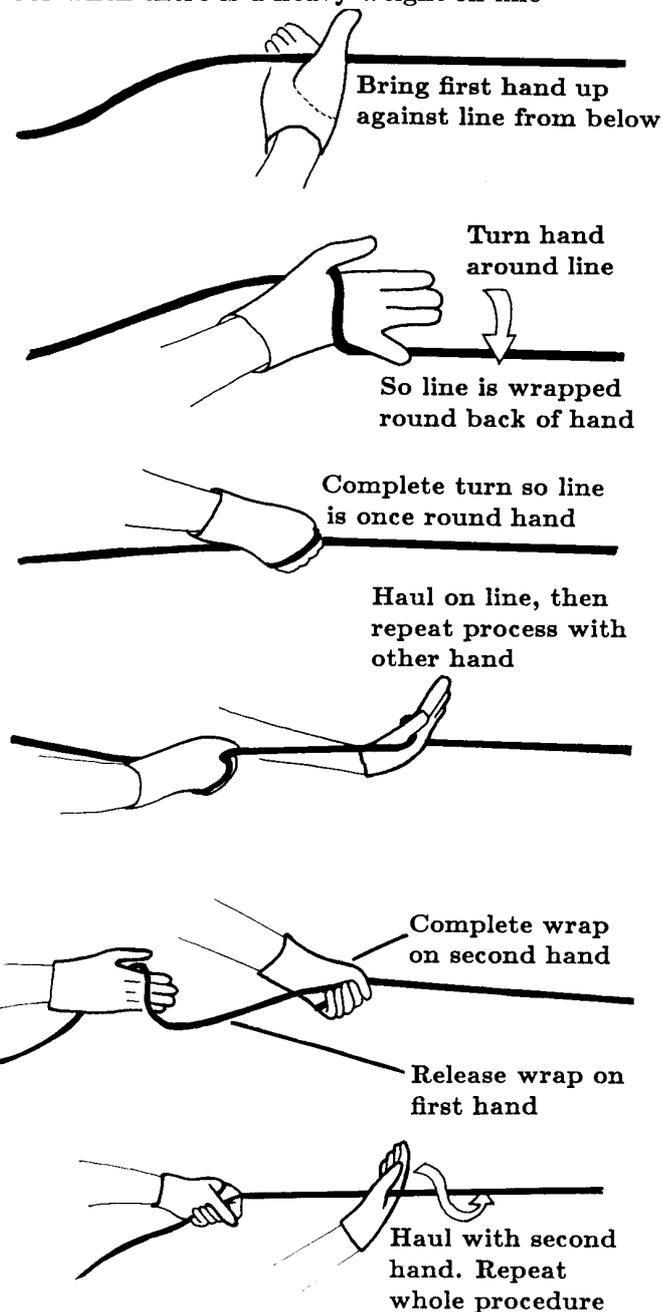
When there is a fish or a very heavy weight on the line, hauling has to be done in a different way. The line is still pulled in overhand, but with one or two wraps being taken around the hand to prevent slipping. The wrap is taken by bringing the palm of the hand up against the line, the thumbs pointing away from the body. The hand is then moved around the line in a circle, with the result that the line takes a complete turn around it. For very heavy fish, it may be necessary to take a second wrap, the same as the first. The result is that the line lies across the palm, with the weight against the heel or back of the hand. The line can then be gripped firmly by closing the fingers around it. By carrying out the procedure with one hand and then the other, hauling proceeds a metre (3 feet) or so at a time.

Overhand hauling

When handling fixed lines, gloves should always be worn, particularly if wire is being used. To bring in a line for checking or changing lures, first grasp the backing cord (by pulling in the lazy line, for those lines attached to a trolling boom). Then pull in the line with a handover-hand action, gripping the line from above with the thumbs pointing inwards toward the body. This action gives a good grip on slippery lines, and, provided that there is not too much weight on the line, allows fast recovery.

WRAPPING

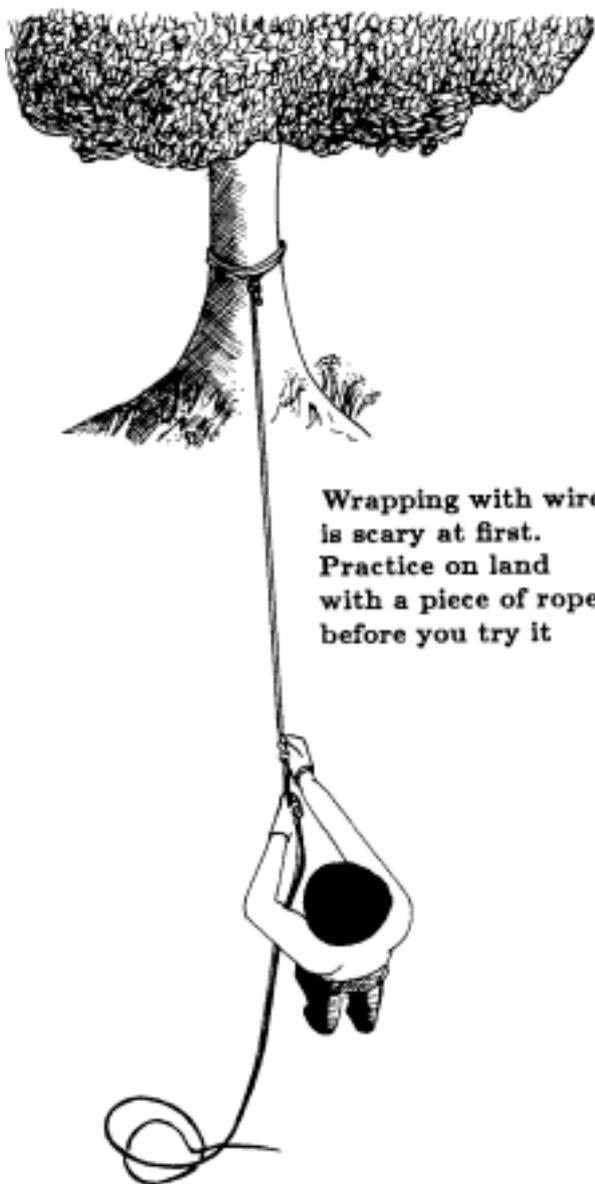
For when there is a heavy weight on line



Releasing the line

The wrapping method of hauling is quite unnerving to a novice, especially when using piano or other singlestrand wire. However, the only real danger is that the wire will start to slip and cut through the gloves and into the hands. Slipping will only occur if the weight on the line is very great (more than 100 kgs (220 lbs) or so), or if the fisherman is not gripping the line tightly enough (often due to lack of confidence in the technique). If the line does start to slip, or the weight is too much to handle, the line can be instantly released by opening the hands and shaking off the loops.

PRACTICE

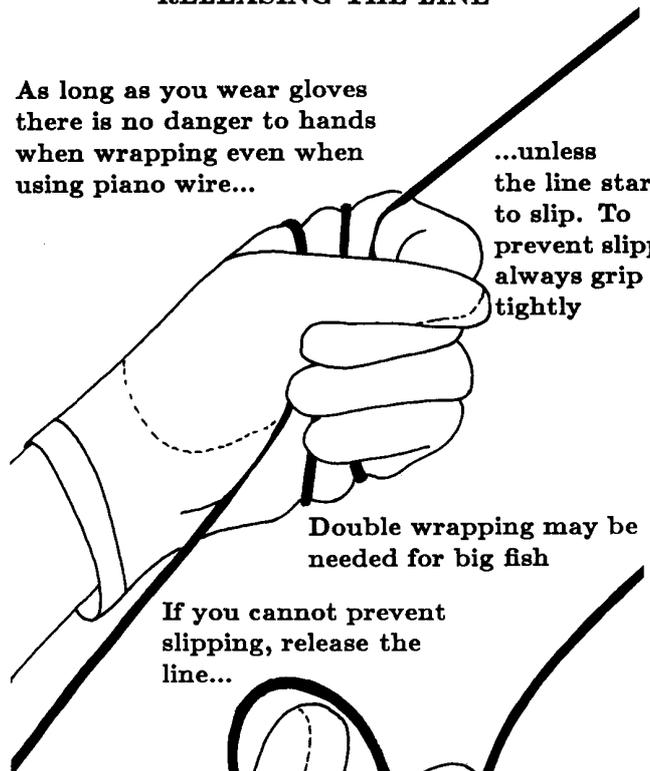


Wrapping with wire is scary at first. Practice on land with a piece of rope before you try it

RELEASING THE LINE

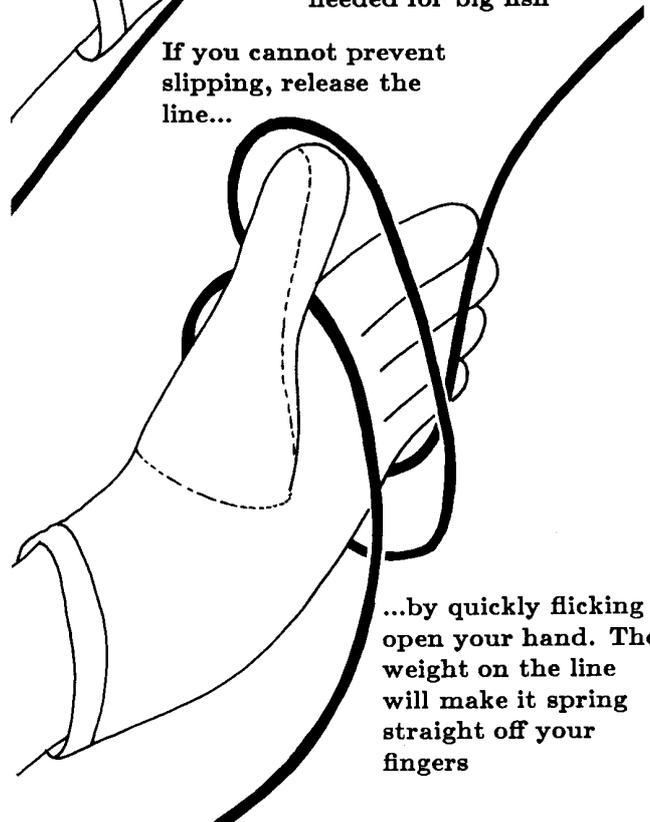
As long as you wear gloves there is no danger to hands when wrapping even when using piano wire...

...unless the line starts to slip. To prevent slipping always grip tightly



Double wrapping may be needed for big fish

If you cannot prevent slipping, release the line...



...by quickly flicking open your hand. The weight on the line will make it spring straight off your fingers

Practice

Confidence in the technique is very important when hauling lines by wrapping. Those not familiar with the technique should practice on a rope tied to a tree, or a lightly weighted monofilament line towed behind the boat, before attempting to haul single-strand wire. Once mastered, this is a rapid and efficient way to haul fine or slippery lines, and will not cause kinking or bending in most types of wire.

When the fish is close to the vessel, it should be manoeuvred into a position suitable for boating, as discussed in Section 6F.

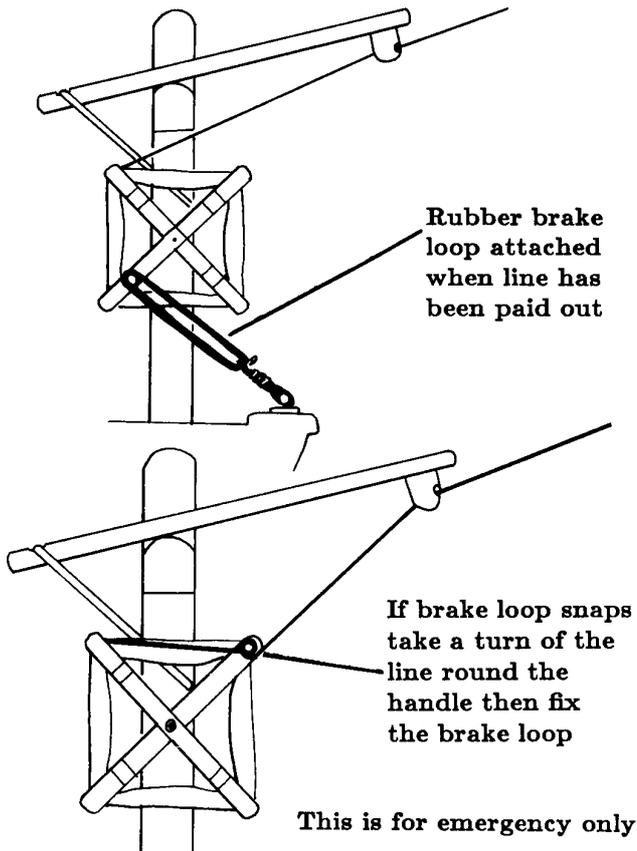
CHAPTER 6: FISHING ACTION

SECTION E: HANDLING FISH ON HANDREELS

Handreels should be rigged with a brake loop as shown in Section 3N. The mainline should be put through the insulator on the reel arm (and also through the boom eye and lazy line loop, when a trolling boom is being used), before attaching the trace, as the lure or bait is normally too large to pass through these holes.

When paying out the line, line length can be estimated by counting the number of turns if the reel. On most 'standard' wooden handreels, one turn is about one metre (3 feet 4 inches).

ATTACHING THE BRAKE

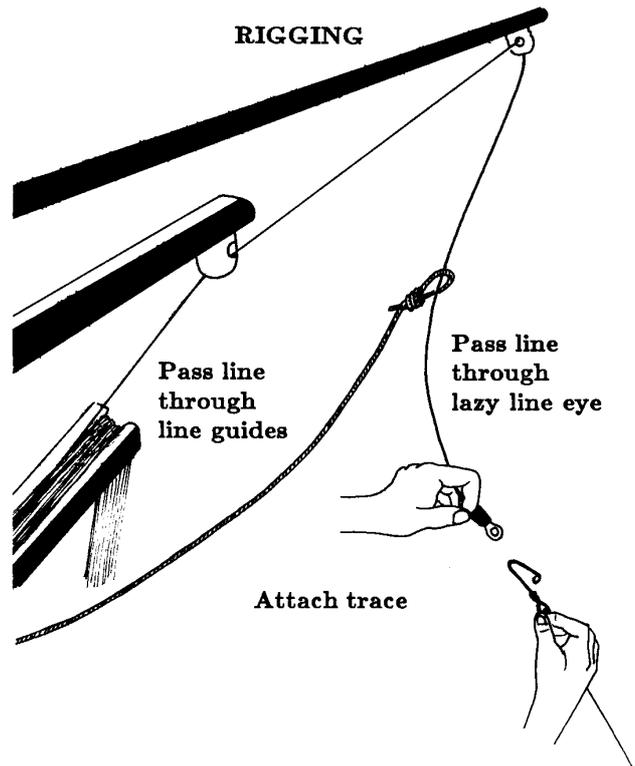


A voiding injury

During fishing, the fisherman should not rest with his hands on the reel, or stand too close to it. When a large fish strikes, the reel is likely to spin rapidly, and can cause a severe injury to any part of the body in its way. Provided that the brake strap is on the reel, the line will not over-run and the fish will tire itself making its initial fight against the resistance of the rubber, rather than the fisherman. Once the reel has stopped spinning, the load can be taken by the fisherman, the brake loop lifted off, and the fish reeled in.

If the fish pulls too hard for the fisherman to control, he should replace the brake loop and stand back for a minute or two while the fish fights the rubber. There is no point in exhausting yourself fighting a fish, and there is always the danger that you will resist him too strongly and break him off.

RIGGING



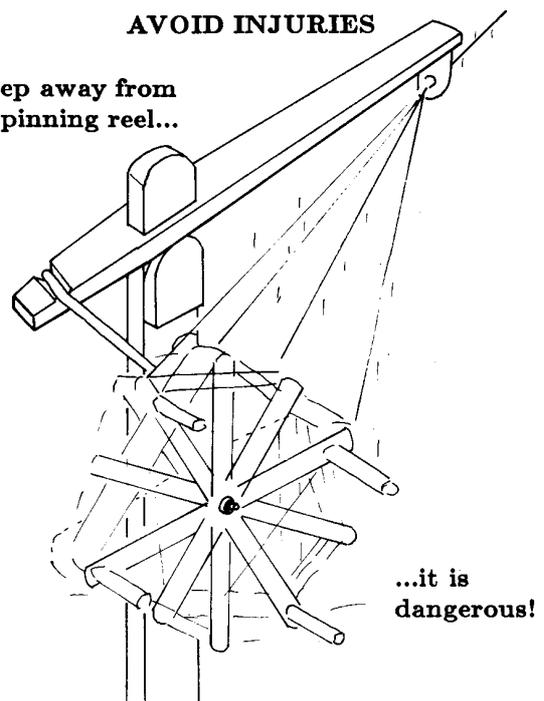
Attaching the brake

When the line has been paid out to the desired length, the rubber brake strap should be looped over the reel handle. This will prevent any more line paying out, and act as a shock absorber in the event of a strike.

If the brake loop snaps or gets broken, the line can be looped behind the reel handle to prevent the line running out. This system eliminates all the advantages of a handreel since it does not provide any 'give' when a fish strikes. It should therefore only be used as an emergency measure.

AVOID INJURIES

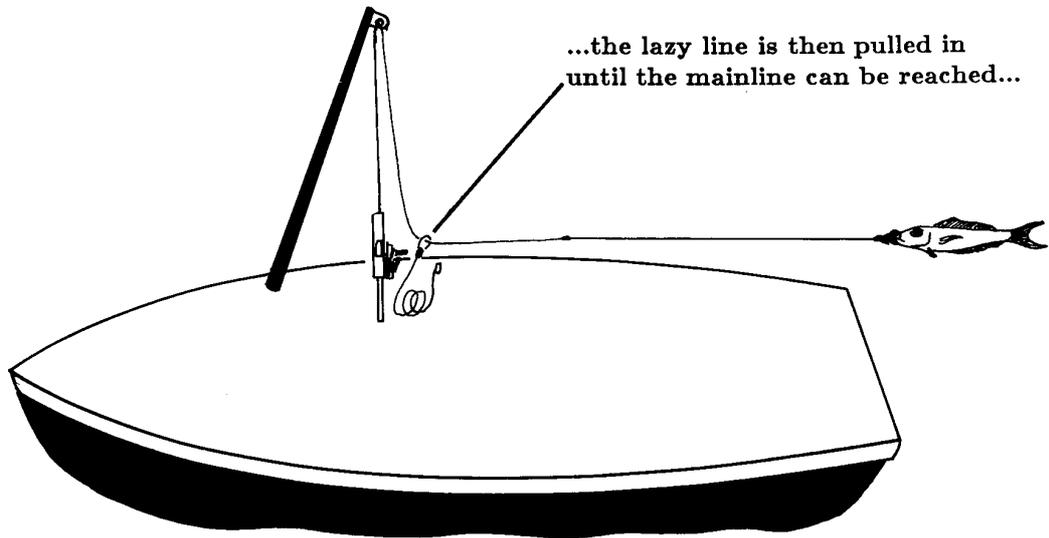
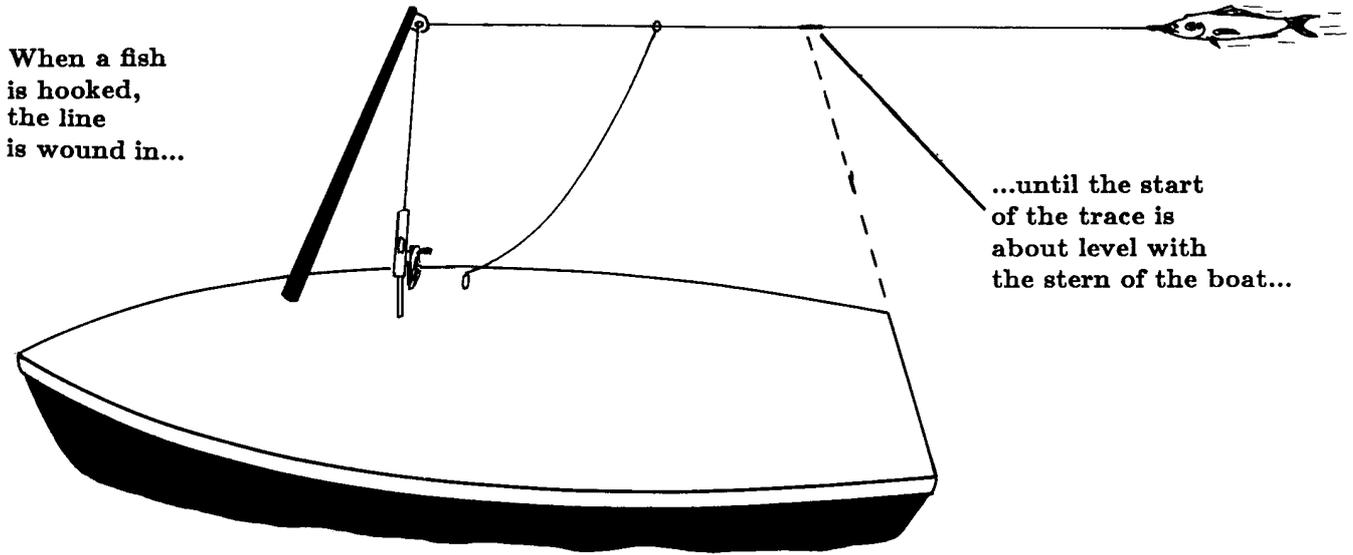
Keep away from a spinning reel...



Winding in

Bringing in the line is simple and quick with a handreel. The mainline is normally wound onto the reel, until the attachment point to the trace is about level with the stern of the boat. Wire traces should not be wound in further than this, as they will kink or curl when pulled through a boom eye or insulator.

WINDING IN



...and the rest is hauled in hand-over-hand

The line is then retrieved (by pulling in the lazy line, when rigged through a trolling boom) and the trace hauled in hand-over-hand, as described in Section 6D. Note that the procedure is different from that with fixed line: with a handreel, the fish is brought close to the boat before pulling in the lazy line; with a fixed line, the lazy line has to be pulled in first, before hauling can begin.

When the fish is close to the vessel, it should be manoeuvred into a position suitable for boating, as discussed in Section 6F.

CHAPTER 6: FISHING ACTION

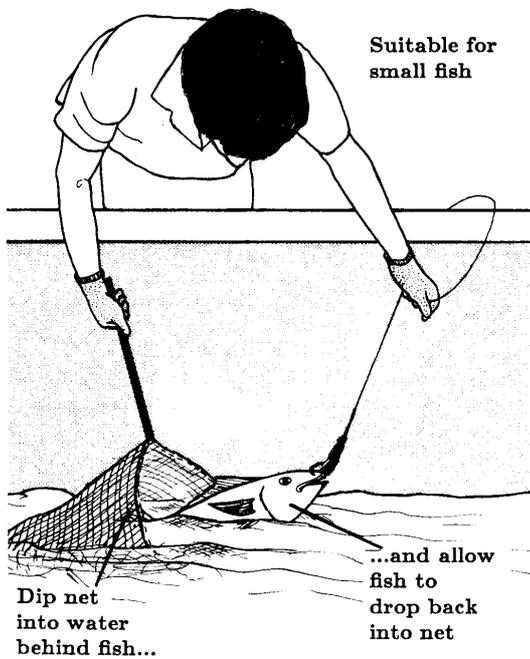
SECTION F: BOATING THE FISH

The time when a fish is being lifted from the water into the boat is the time when it is most likely to be lost. Extra weight may come on to the hooks, and tear them from the fish's mouth, or the fish may unhook itself as it thrashes in panic. It is therefore important to boat the fish in a smooth, efficient manner, using a net, gaff or other landing tool (see Section 2H).

Fish size

The size of the fish can usually be estimated while it is being hauled in. When it first comes into view as it is brought towards the boat, the size can be confirmed and a decision made as to whether a net or gaff will be needed. As a general rule, fish under about 2 kg (5 lbs) can be lifted straight into the boat, fish between 2 kg and 5 kg (5 and 12 lbs) should be landed using a net or small gaff, and those over 5 kg (12 lbs) should be gaffed. Very large fish or sharks may need two or more of the crew, with a gaff each, to boat them.

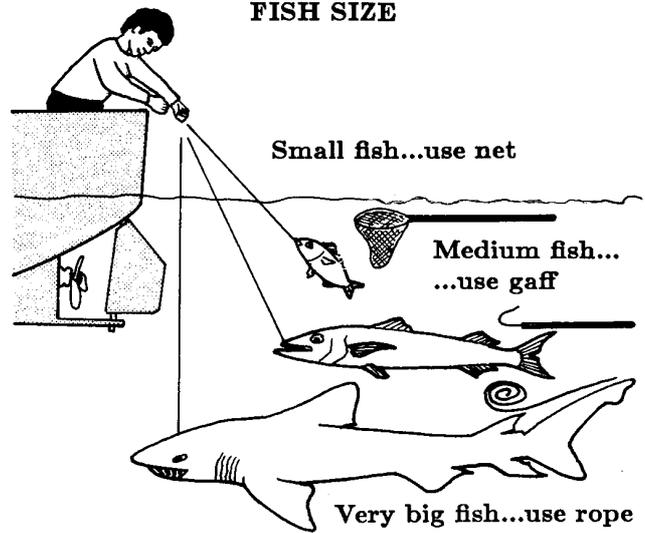
NETTING



Gaffing

Gaffing is by far the most popular method of boating fish. Some different types of gaff are described in Section 2H. Whenever possible, the fish should be gaffed in the head. This avoids damage to the flesh, and may help stun or kill the fish. A fish gaffed through the body has more leverage to use when thrashing about, and may succeed in leaping off the gaff and back into the water.

FISH SIZE

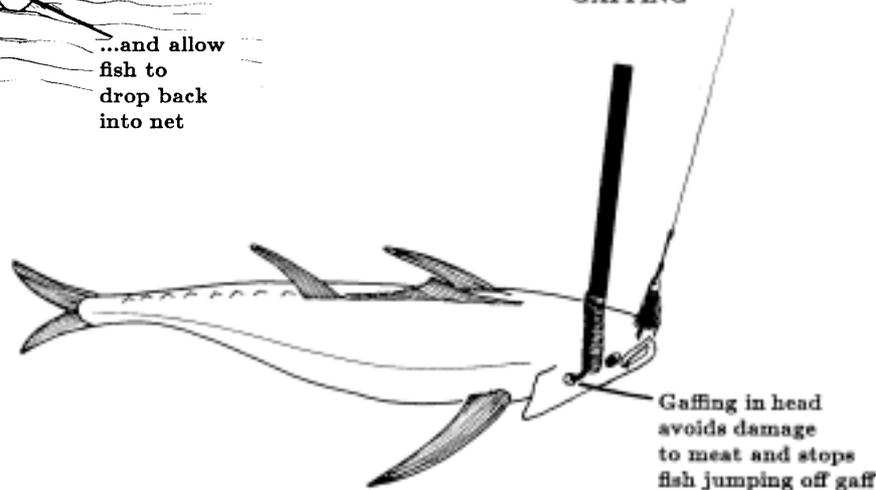


Lifting and netting

Lifting fish aboard is a simple operation. The trace should be grasped a foot or two in front of the hook and the fish lifted smoothly out of the water and into the killing box or other receptacle.

When netting, the trace is grasped in the same place, and the net brought up over the tail and body of the fish from behind. Nets have a lot of drag when dipped into the water from a moving boat, so the netting action needs to be smooth and strong.

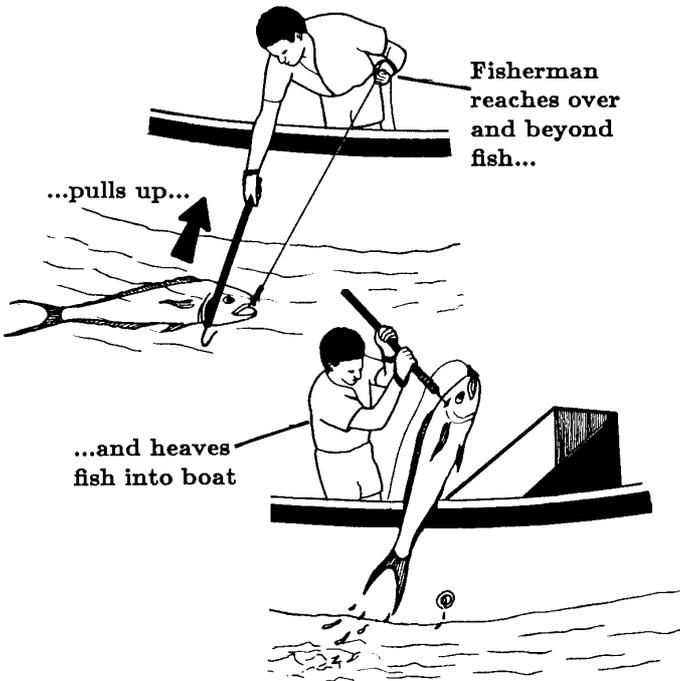
GAFFING



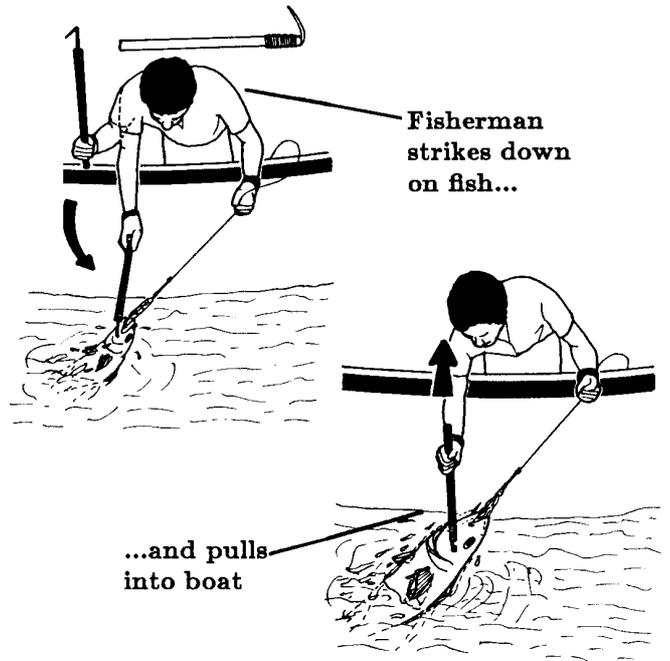
Gaff actions

The actions of the two main types of gaff, the 'L'-gaff and the 'J'-gaff, are shown below. The L-gaff is used mainly on smaller-sized fish, and the action is to strike down on the fish from above. The J-gaff is more common and is better for larger, heavy fish. The action is to reach over and beyond the fish with the gaff, and then jerk back towards the boat, sinking the gaff home. The fish can then be hauled aboard with both hands holding the gaff handle.

'J'-GAFF ACTION



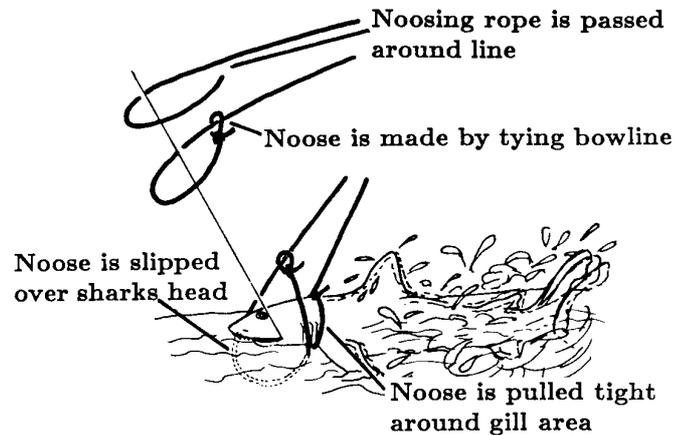
'L'-GAFF ACTION



Noosing

Noosing is mainly used as a way of manhandling sharks or other fish which are too large to be brought aboard by one or two men using gaffs. A length of stiff sinking rope should be used -longline cord is ideal. The rope is passed around the line on which the shark is hooked, and the end is then tied in a bowline knot around the standing part of the rope. This forms a noose which is then opened up wide and allowed to slide down the line and into the water. The shark is held close to the water surface using the fishing line, and the noose is manoeuvred over the its head, with the help of gaffs if necessary, until it is around the gill area. It is not necessary to get the rope back over the sharks fins -this is just about impossible with some long-finned types. Once the noose is around the gill area, it is pulled tight, and the shark can then be hauled aboard, or just tied off until it dies.

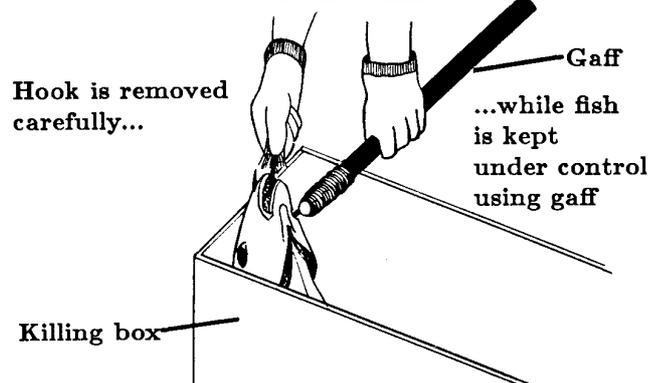
NOOSING



Unhooking

Once the fish is on board, it should be lifted straight into the killing box or a part of the boat where it can be controlled for unhooking. The fish should be held and controlled with the gaff to make unhooking easier. The hooks can be removed by hand, or with the aid of pliers and a knife, depending on the type of fish and the way it is hooked. Once hooks are removed, the fish can be dropped off the gaff into the killing box.

UNHOOKING



CHAPTER 6: FISHING ACTION

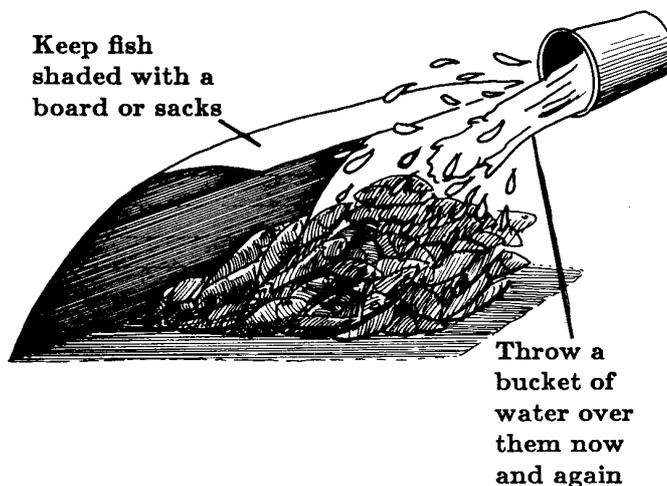
SECTION G: TAKING CARE OF THE CATCH

Commercial fishermen can usually expect to get more money for their fish if it looks well handled and presented. Taking care of the catch starts from the minute the fish is boated, and may involve only a little effort on the fisherman's part.

Shading and cooling

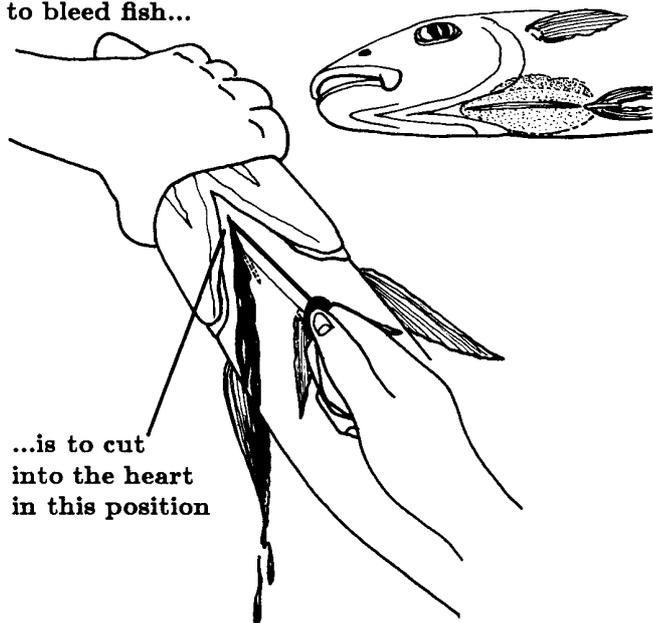
Fish should always be protected from the sun, which makes them decay much faster and dries out the surface, resulting in a poor appearance. If possible, put a board or cover over the killing box to shade the fish. Alternatively, cover them with sacking or some similar material. Throw a bucket of seawater over them from time to time to prevent drying, wash off blood and slime, and keep the fish cool.

SHADING AND COOLING



BLEEDING

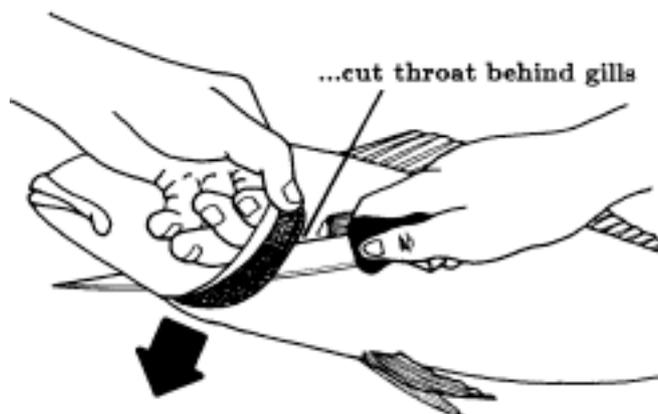
A quick and clean way to bleed fish...



Bleeding

If the fish will ultimately be sold as fillets, it is usually worth bleeding them while still alive. This ensures that the flesh of white fish will be truly white -not pink or grey -when filleted. Bleeding also helps remove the lactic acid which builds up in the fish's body when it is struggling on the line. This can cause the flesh to become soft and jelly-like, especially in fatty fish like tunas.

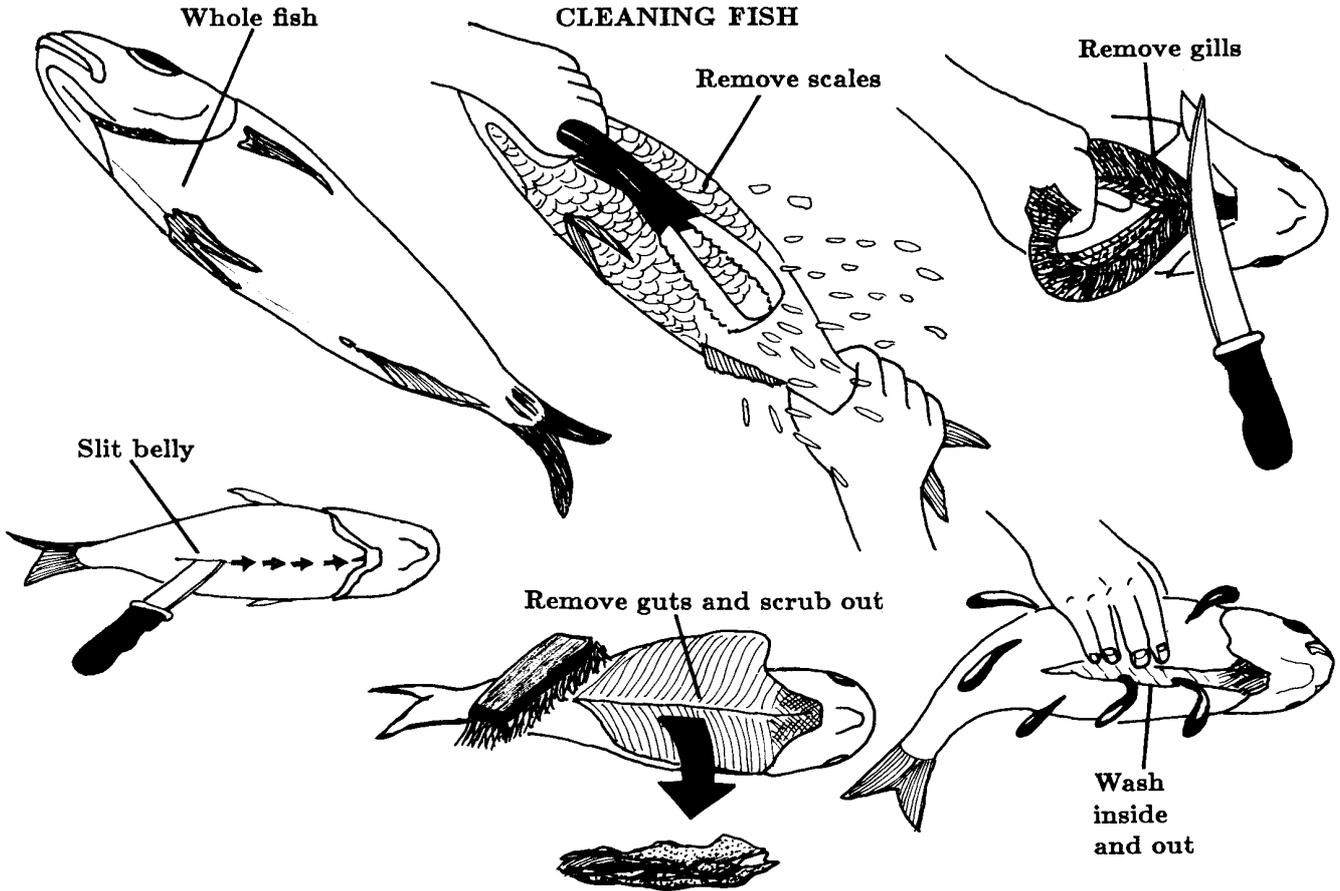
Easier but less tidy...



Bleeding is done by slitting the 'throat' of the fish while it is still on the hook or gaff. The most inconspicuous way is to make the incision into the heart region of the fish, between the ventral fins. When the appearance of the whole fish is less important, a knife can simply be pushed behind the gills, cutting through the throat from the inside.

Cleaning fish

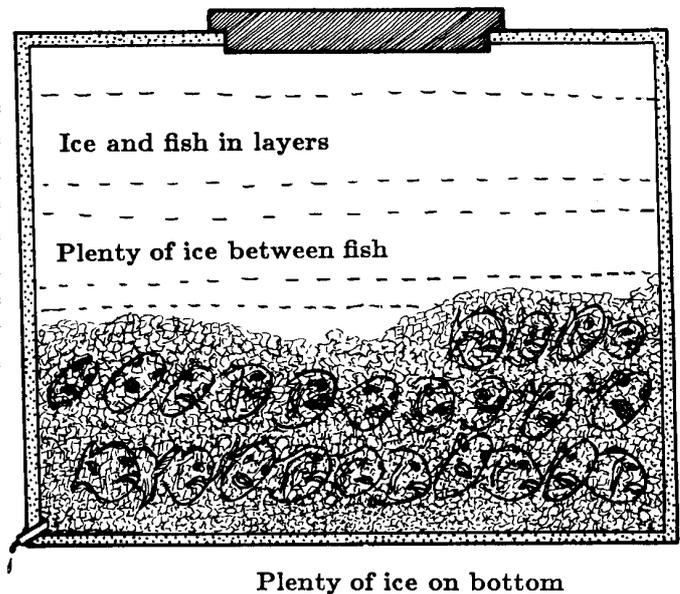
In some locations, the market requires fish to be landed whole, in others consumers prefer their fish to be cleaned -that is either gutted, gilled, scaled, or some combination of these. If the fish do have to be cleaned, this should be done reasonably soon after the fish has died in the killing box, perhaps during a lull in the fishing. If time does not permit this, the fish can be iced down whole and cleaned later, after the fishing is finished.



PROPER ICING

Icing

If the fishing trip is longer than a few hours, then ice should be carried and the fish iced down as soon as possible after capture. The best way is to allow fish to accumulate in the killing box for an hour or two, or until a reasonable quantity has been caught, and then transfer them to the ice box. Working to this type of pattern avoids too much interruption to the fishing, and unnecessary opening of the ice box. When put into the ice box, the fish should be properly layered or mixed with the ice to ensure rapid and complete cooling.





Location: Nukulaelae, Tuvalu

Photo: L.B. Chapman

Wahoo trolled between atolls in the central Pacific



Location: Niue Island

Photo : P. D. Mead

The catch from a short trolling trip by a dinghy fisherman