



“Saving our Fisheries Together”

Tournament Fish Handling Procedures

This is a recommended procedure that we would like to see all our member clubs across the country adopt. We know that conditions in some parts of the country may necessitate certain adaptations to this procedure but it is our goal to get all of our tournaments and events handling fish in a safe and effective manner to protect our resource.

Pre-tournament

We would like every tournament director to include a brief paragraph on fish care as part of their pre-tournament briefing. The content should read something like this:

“Ladies and Gentleman, one of the greatest services we as anglers can provide to our sport to insure its continued existence is the proper care of our catch. From the moment you hook a fish to the moment we place it back into the water their survival depends on us. Please make it your responsibility to strive for a 100% survival rate of our most important resource....Our Fish!!”

You should also go on to mention fish handling, proper live well operation and any local items that apply, along with providing a copy of these procedures available as handouts.

Tournament Weigh-ins

This is an area that we can all strive to work on! We need to try and standardize our weigh-in procedures for handling fish. First of all set up your weigh-in area close to where the anglers dock their boats for the event. The walk from the angler's boat to the weigh-in tanks should be 30 seconds or less which equates to approximately 100 yards. Here are some standard weigh-in procedures that should be considered for every tournament.

1. Limit weigh-in bags to now more than 20% of the entry. (In no case should you put out more bags than you have aerated holding tanks or room to hold them.)
2. Encourage all anglers to use water enhancement additives like Rejuvenade.
3. Adopt a practice of using one dip take with aerator air stones for every 20 anglers.
4. All tournaments over 25 boats should establish flights for takeoff and weigh-in. The main objective is to space out the anglers waiting at the bump table line and in the holding tanks. Fish survival should be our first priority in this event.
5. Have your anglers bring their fish to the weigh-in from the water whenever possible. Elevated parking lot temperatures can quickly reduce the oxygen levels in livewells.

TBF highly recommends the use of aerated tubs that fish can be submerged in while the anglers are waiting to take their turn to weigh in. These tubs can be purchased relatively inexpensively and filled with a common submersible pump. (See TBF recommended standard weigh in equipment list)

The use of pure bottled oxygen through a tube bubbling system or air stones is the absolute best for professional fish care. However, it should be noted that pure oxygen and pure oxygen equipment should only be used by and operated by experienced people, trained in its use. Pure oxygen is highly flammable and should not be anywhere near a spark or open flame, nor should it be used with plain vinyl tubing. Tubing rated for oxygen use is all that should be used, be sure any gauges, regulators or flow controllers are also designed for use in pure oxygen service and you are trained on how to use them.

For most clubs and Federations a common fresh air pump capable of supplying sufficient air supply to all your tanks is affordable and the next best solution to pure oxygen fish care. Your system should have bubbler tubes or air stones that can be placed into each individual angler's bag. This is the best practice for increasing the survival rate of bass for most clubs. Remember to be cautious where you place an air pump, remember it will pump out what it draws in so do not place it next top a exhaust car pipe for example.

The difference between the two is that bottled Oxygen provides air with an oxygen content of approximately 90-99% where as an air pump is providing atmospheric air with an oxygen rate of approximately 20.9%.

Adding water enhancement additives like Rejuvenade to these tanks is recommended as is adding bags of ice to cool the water no more than 8-10 degree below the lake temperature and monitoring the water temperature and dissolved oxygen content during the weigh-in process.

Acquiring a system similar to the description above should be a bass clubs number one capital expenditure priority!

Bump Table Operation

Regardless of who performs this duty one of the most important conservation keys to protecting our catch is the timing of the bump table operators. Once the bag of water is dumped into the Bump Tub this starts the clock on the length of time the fish are without water. It should be the goal of every bump table operator to be placing the fish back in the bag just as the weight of the previous catch is being announced. By achieving this goal you are ready to send the next contestant to the scales and there will be a minimum delay if there is a short interview with the angler.

Post Scale Water Tank

One of the absolute best fish care procedures that we can adopt at every weigh-in is having a post scale or splash water tank. Getting water back on these fish immediately after they have been weighed in is crucial to fish survival. If pictures are to be taken give the fish a moment back in the water before pulling them for the angler's moment of glory. Then the fish and the angler both can take a few deep breaths and be ready for their time to "shine!"

The best thing about this practice is that any other fish in the bag won't be negatively affected while the photograph of one or two are being taken.

Releasing Caught fish

Returning fish that have been weighed-in back to the water or to a release boat as quickly as possible should be the goal of every event.

Fish should be return to "non-shallow" water 5-15 feet as quickly as possible.

There has been a lot of discussion about how to handle fish that have been caught in deeper waters that have experienced an inflation of their air bladder. This effect causes a fish to loose its balance and their ability to swim correctly and return to deeper water. It is very similar to a human getting the "bends" by coming up to fast while scuba diving. There are two generally accepted practices for correcting this problem. They are both referred to as "Fizzing."

One method requires the use of a hypodermic needle that is inserted into the fish's air bladder to allow this trapped oxygen to escape. This procedure needs to be administered by someone who has experience and proper training to do this. Doing this procedure incorrectly can most certainly cause the fishes death in many cases. It is not hard to do but must be "learned."

The second alternative, which is what we recommend for most, calls for placing the distressed fish in a boat and returning them to water in the 20 foot depth range but no deeper than approximately 30 foot. A simple milk basket with weight attached and a rope to lower it into the water is all that is necessary. Place the fish that are experiencing distress in the basket and lower it to the waters

surface. Quickly flip the basket over trapping the fish in the basket with the open end facing down. Lower the basket to the 20 foot depth and hold it there for approximately 2 minutes. Often times you will see the air bubbles release as the fish "burb" and come to the surface. Pull the basket back into the boat and the vented fish will be gone.

This procedure is inexpensive, easy to do and equally as effective as fizzing with a needle. The best feature of this practice is that anyone can do it with minimal training! If your club does not have a release boat then place the fish that are in distress into the live well of a bass boat and quickly transport them to the desired depth to perform this task. It's simple, easy and should become a standard practice with every tournament.

Track your survival rate

Each club should assign someone the responsibility of tracking the survival rate of the fish that they weigh-in. Tracking this will let your club know if your practices are effective or if they need to be changed to fit your situation.

Caring for your catch is the responsibility of everyone involved in the tournament! And fish care starts BEFORE the first fish is caught and it starts with you the angler and ends with you the angler so make it a point to get involved in your clubs fish care initiative!

Please hand out the TBF "Angler Responsibilities" handout to all tournament anglers. Fish care begins with the angler and ends with the proper release of our catch back into the water! Make these procedures part of your clubs standard practice.

TBF Conservation Group, Project Development Team