



SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
FOURTEENTH REGULAR SESSION
Busan, Korea
8-16 August 2018

Safe Release Guidelines for Sharks and Rays

WCPFC-SC14-2018/EB-IP-03

Common Oceans (ABNJ) Tuna Project¹

¹ Coordinated by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and funded by the Global Environment Facility.

Safe Release Guidelines for Sharks and Rays

Covering Note

Shelley Clarke¹

At its December 2017 meeting in Manila, Philippines, WCPFC14 agreed to task SC14 to: *“develop proposed guidelines for safe release of rays and sharks and taking into account existing standards or guidelines adopted on other fora. The Commission agreed that priority should be given to the development of guidelines for safe release of silky shark and oceanic whitetip sharks.”* (WCPFC14 Summary Report at para. 331)

This topic was discussed at the Workshop on WCPFC Bycatch Mitigation Problem-Solving², where it was suggested that new guidelines should be based on the recently adopted “Best Handling Practices for the Safe Release of Mantas and Mobulids” (**Annex A**)³. The following guidance was also provided:

- *“Use the existing manta and mobulid guidelines as the starting text;*
- *Add graphics/drawings for the do’s and don’ts contained in the existing guideline;*
- *Consider constructing the format to facilitate conversion to a poster format;*
- *Modify language as necessary to suit sharks (e.g. weight limits may need to be adjusted for sharks, special language may be needed for thresher sharks); and*
- *Ensure there is appropriate language regarding the maintenance of crew safety”.*

The Common Oceans (ABNJ) Tuna Project agreed to follow these suggestions and prepare a draft document for submission as an information paper to SC14. The attached text and drawings follow the do’s and don’ts format for purse seine and longline fisheries used by the adopted manta and mobulid guidelines (**Annex A**), but the text has been considerably shortened and adjusted in some cases. The drawings, which represent placeholders, were taken from two existing sets of guidelines with permission:

- ✧ Gilman, E. (Editor). 2014. Methods for Longline Fishers to Safely Handle and Release Unwanted Sharks and Rays. Luen Thai Fishing Venture, Resources Legacy Fund, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, The Safina Center. Honolulu, USA. English and Chinese. Available online: https://sites.google.com/site/seafoodcompaniestunamanagement/home/WCPO_Tuna_Alignment_Group/training-materials-for-longline-fishers ; and
- ✧ Poisson F, Vernet AL, Seret B, Dagorn L (2012) Good practices to reduce the mortality of sharks and rays caught incidentally by the tropical tuna purse seiners. EU FP7 project #210496 MADE, Montpellier, France. Available online: <https://www.bmis-bycatch.org/references/injt2ke5>

It is anticipated that new illustrations would be prepared if there is interest in formalizing these guidelines for adoption by the Commission.

SC14 is invited to consider the attached materials while discussing how best to respond to WCPFC14’s request.

¹ Common Oceans (ABNJ) Tuna Project, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, Italy

² Held on 28-30 May 2018 in Nouméa, New Caledonia; see WCPFC-2018-SC14/EB-WP-12

³<https://www.wcpfc.int/system/files/Att%20P%20Guidelines%20for%20safe%20handling%20of%20mantas%20and%20mobulids.pdf>

WCPFC Safe Release Guidelines for Sharks and Rays (other than whale sharks)

Draft for discussion at SC14

EB-IP-03

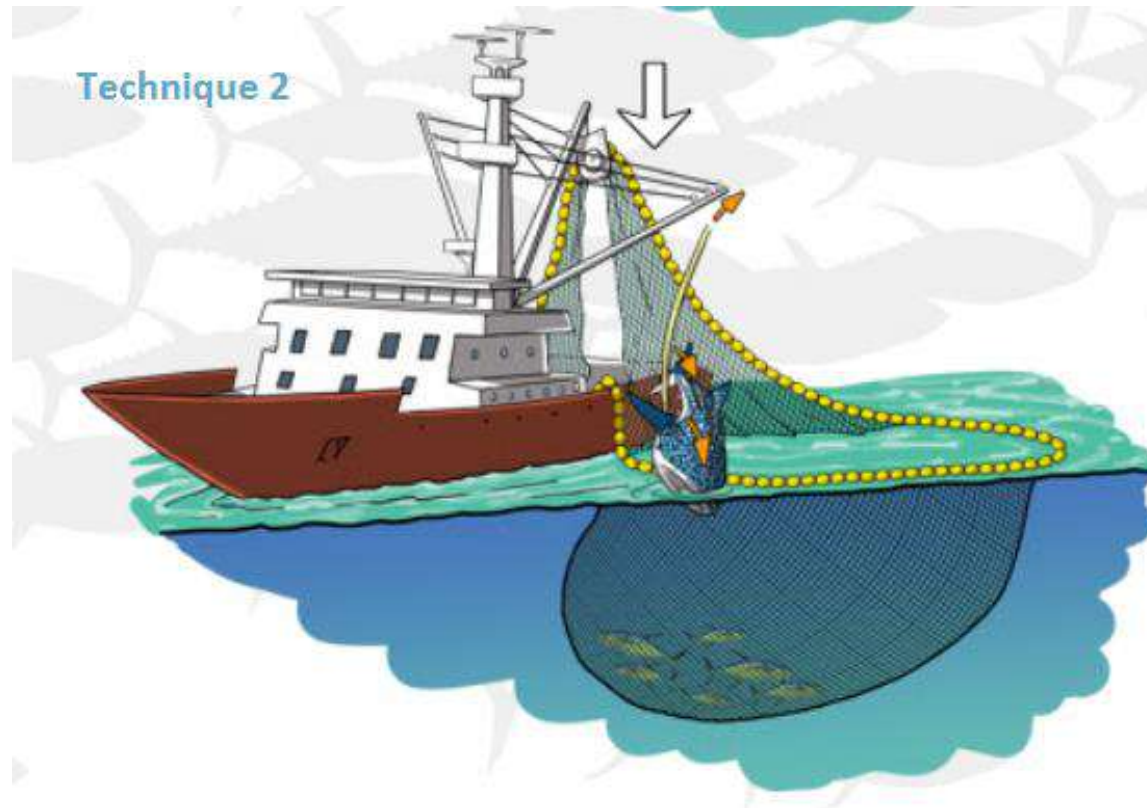
Purse Seine Fishery



SAFETY FIRST -

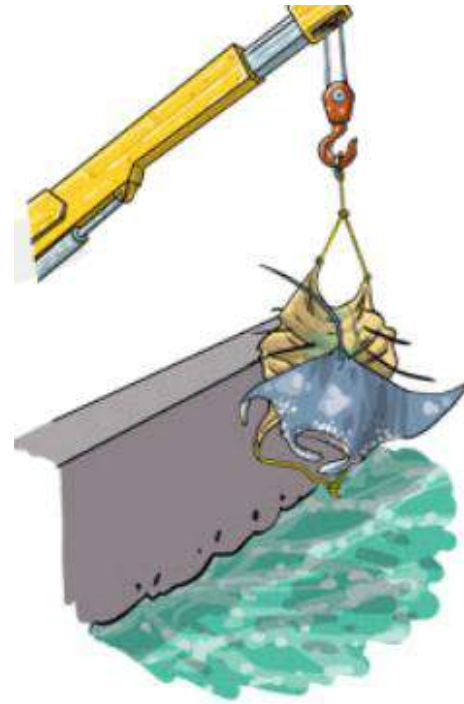
Even if sharks and rays appear dead, keep away from sharks' jaws and stingrays' tails to avoid injuries and being struck.

Do:
Release while still free-swimming, if possible



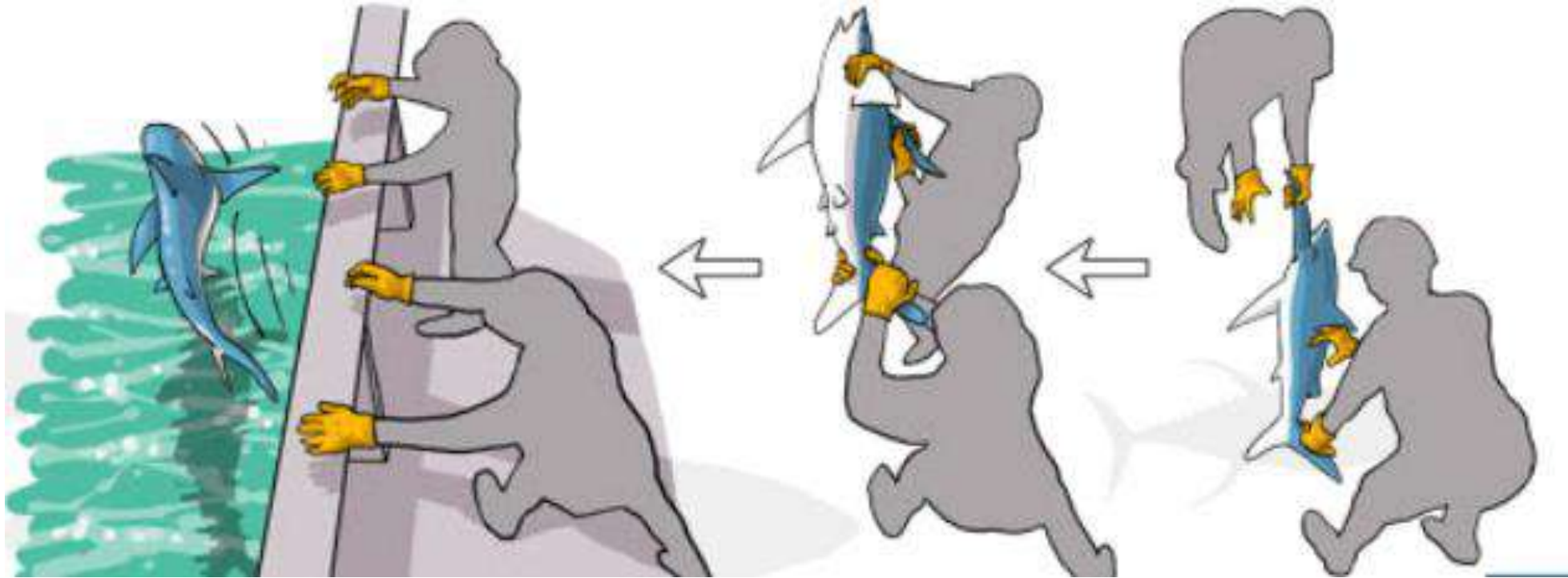
Do:

Brail larger sharks and rays (>10 kg) to deck, then release using a cargo net or canvas sling

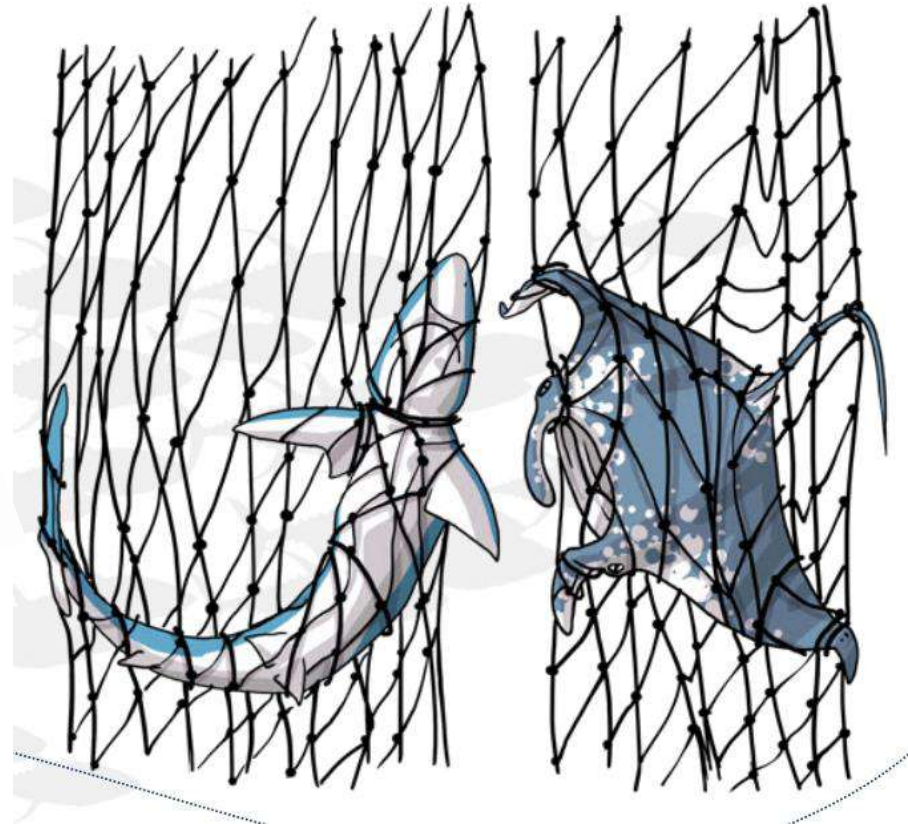


Do:

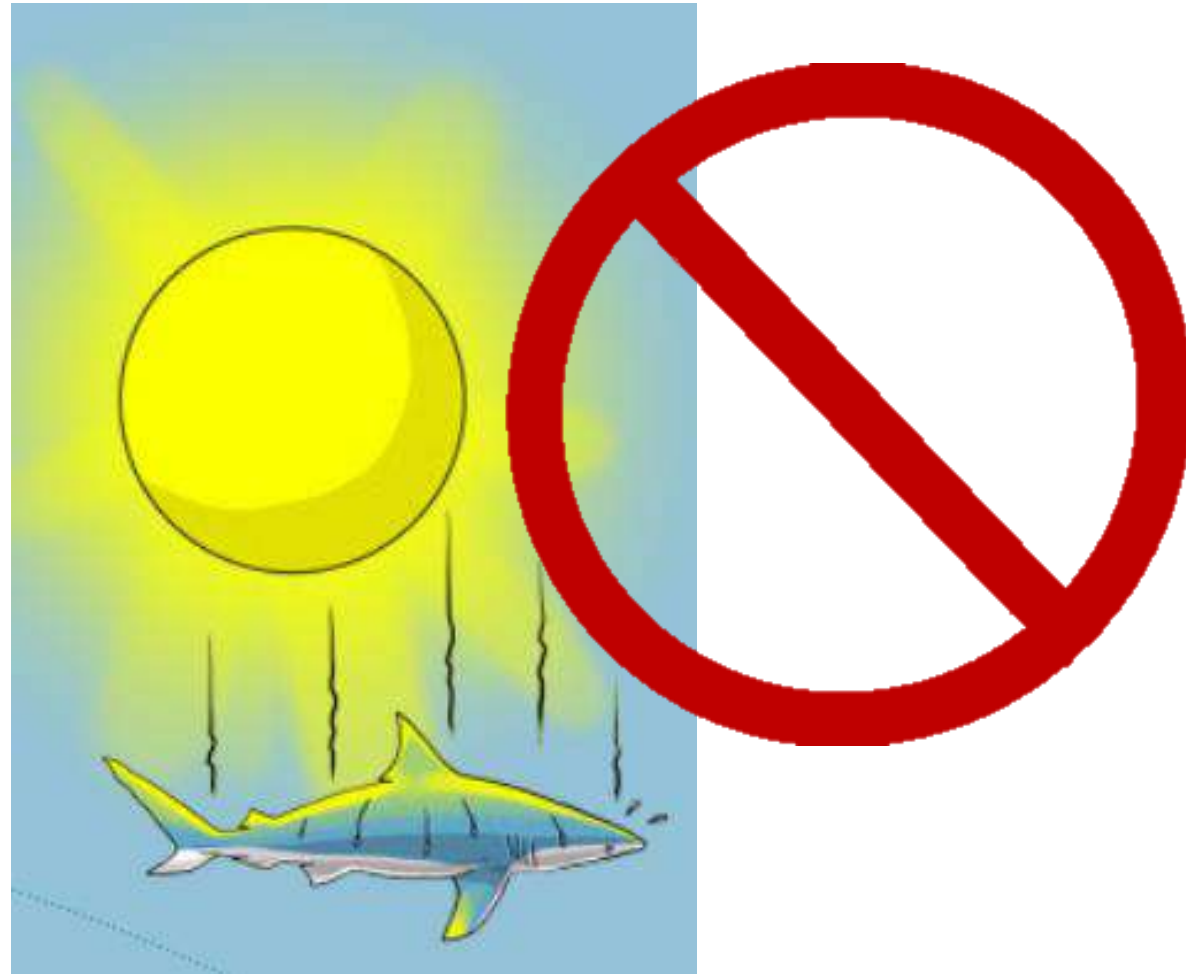
Handle smaller sharks and rays (<10 kg) with 2 people using a stretcher, if possible



Do:
Cut away entangled netting to release



Do not:
Leave the animal on deck for a long time



Do not:
Punch holes through the bodies



Do not:

Drag, carry, lift or pull by head or tail



Longline Fishery

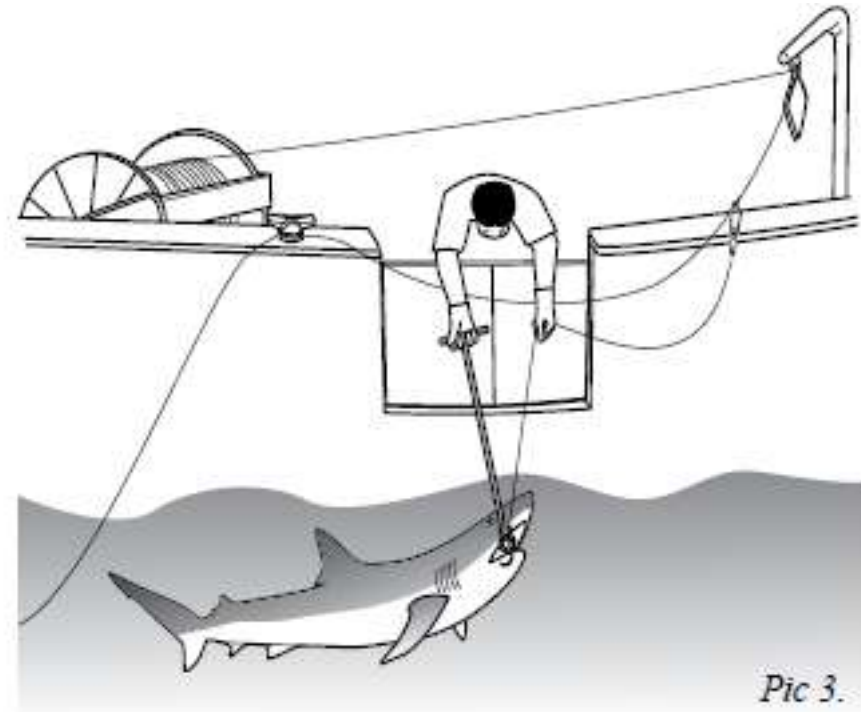
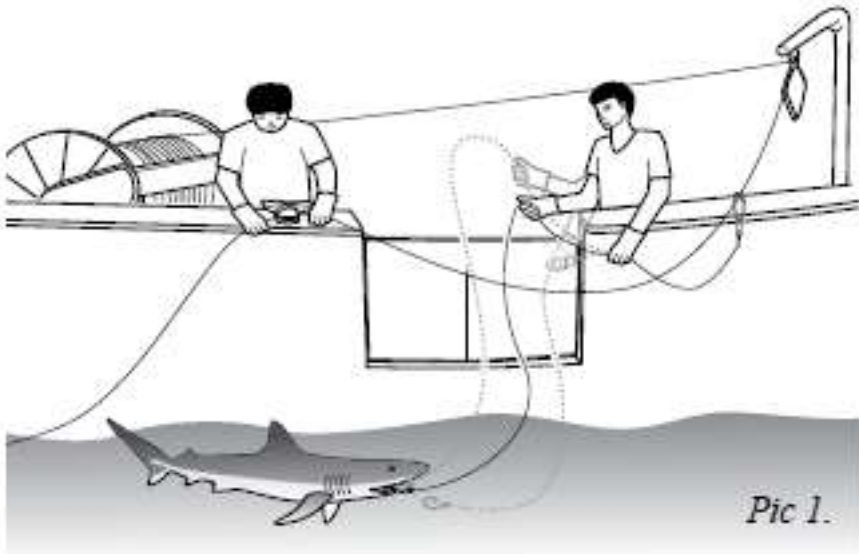


SAFETY FIRST -

Even if sharks and rays appear dead, keep away from sharks' jaws and stingrays' tails to avoid injuries and being struck.

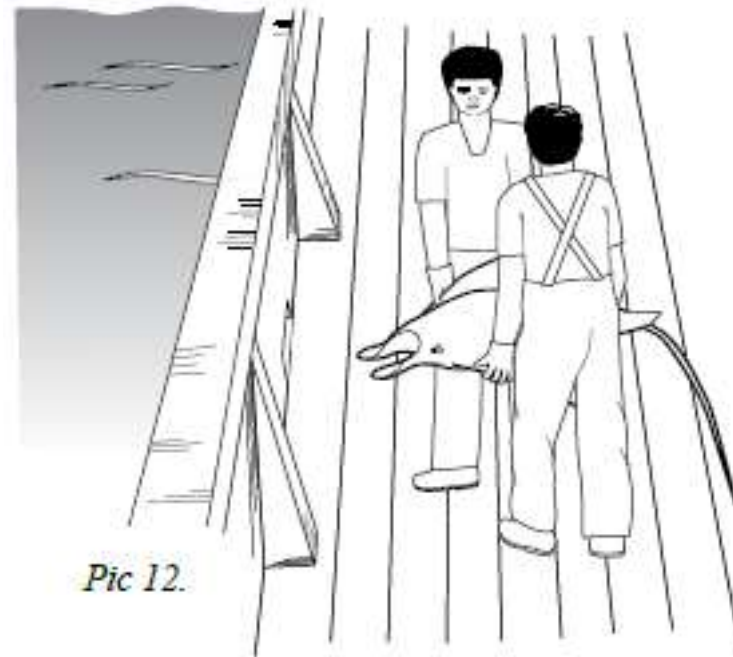
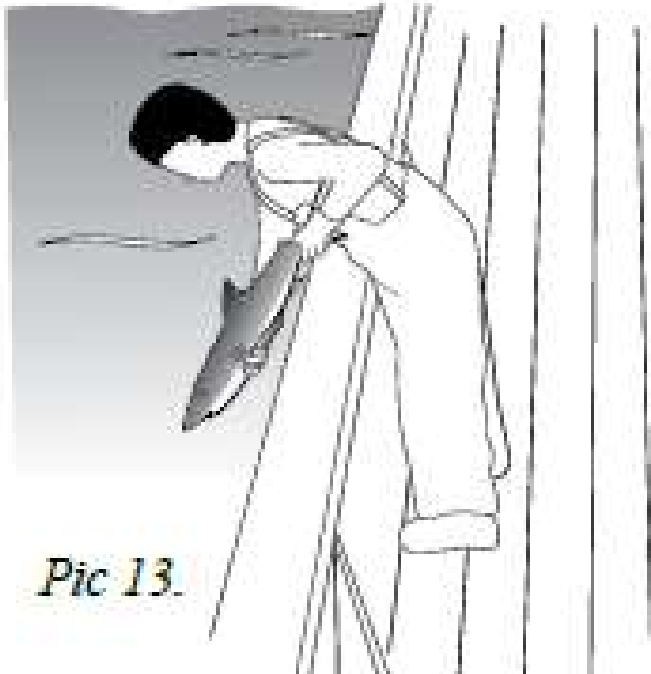
Do:

Release large animals (>10kg) in the water, if possible, and cut the gear as close as possible to the hook



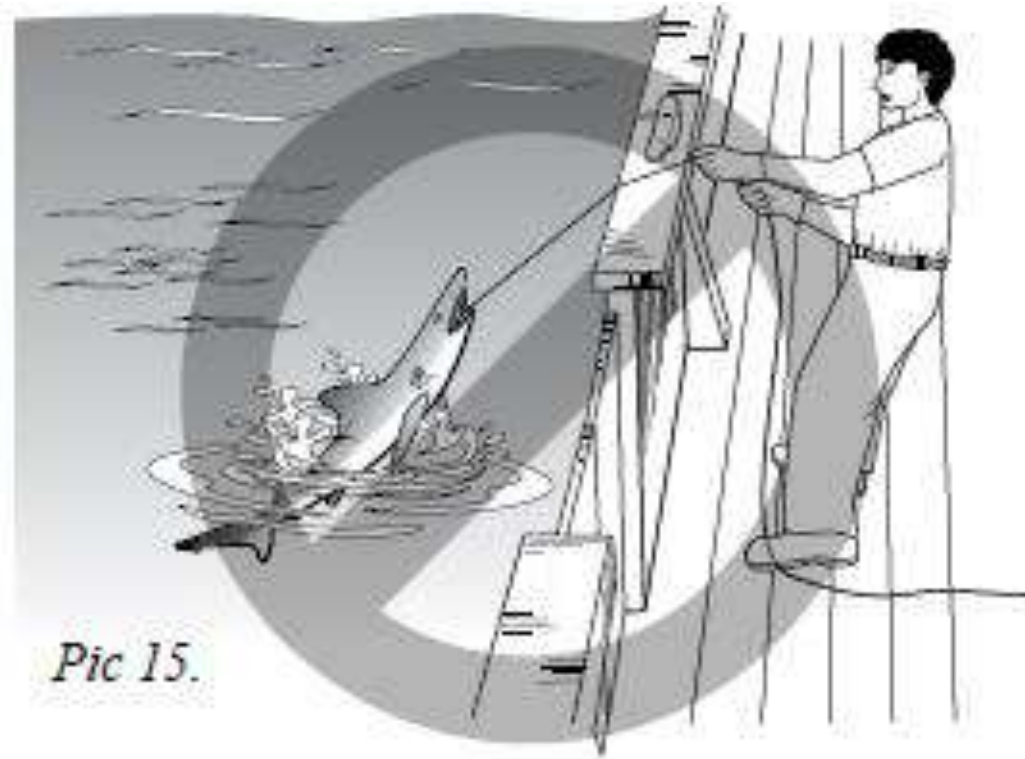
Do:

Bring small animals (<10kg) onboard and the cut gear as close as possible (< 50 cm) to the hook



Don't:

Hit the animal against any surface to release the line

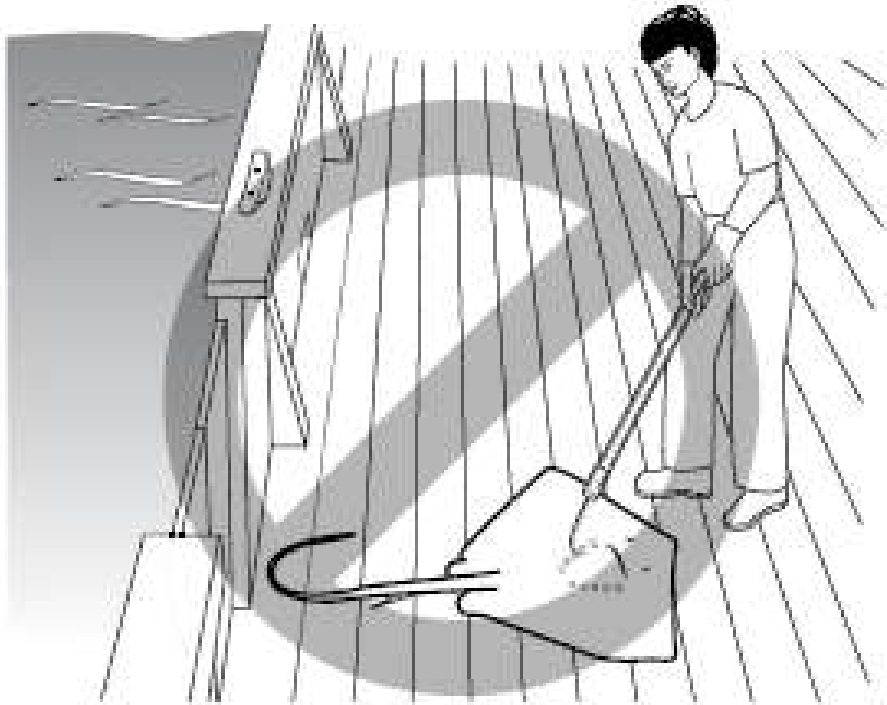


Don't:

Try to dislodge a deep hook by pulling or using a de-hooker



Don't:
Gaff or cut the tail or other parts



Don't:
Carry, lift or pull by the tail, gills or cephalic lobes





**COMMISSION
FOURTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**
Manila, Philippines
3 – 7 December 2017

BEST HANDLING PRACTICES FOR THE SAFE RELEASE OF MANTAS & MOBULIDS

At WCPFC13, the Commission designated six species of manta and mobulid rays as key shark species for assessment in December 2016 and called for the development of safe release guidelines for manta and mobulid rays during SC13.

The following are recommended non-binding guidelines of best handling practices of manta and mobulid rays for both purse seine and longline fisheries:

Purse Seine

Do's:

- Release rays while they are still free-swimming whenever possible (e.g. back down procedure, submerging corks, cutting net).
- It is preferable that larger rays (>60 kg), that are too large to be lifted safely by hand are brailed out of the net and released using a purpose built large-mesh cargo net or canvas sling or similar device as recommended in document SC08-EB-IP-12 (Poisson *et al.* 2012, Good practices to reduce the mortality of sharks and rays caught incidentally by the tropical tuna purse seiners). [Note: It is preferable that release nets or devices are prepared prior to each set.]
- It is preferable that small (< 30 kg) and medium rays (30-60 kg) are handled by 2 or 3 people and carried by the sides of its wings or preferably using a purpose-built cradle/stretchers while ensuring the safety of the crew.
- When entangled in netting, carefully cut the net away from the animal and release to the sea as quickly as possible while ensuring the safety of the crew.

Don'ts:

- Do not leave a ray on deck until hauling is finished before returning it to the sea.
- Do not punch holes through the bodies of rays (e.g. to pass a cable or line through for lifting the ray).
- Do not gaff, drag, carry, lift or pull a ray by its “cephalic lobes” or tail or by inserting hooks or hands into the gill slits or the spiracles.

Longline

Do's:

- For small rays, gently bring on board and remove as much gear as possible by backing the hook out. If hooks are embedded, either cut the hook with bolt cutters or cut the line at the hook and gently return the animal to the sea.
- For medium to large rays (>30 kg), leave the animal in the water and use a dehooker to remove the hook or a long-handled line cutter to cut the gear as close to the hook as possible (ideally leaving < 0.5 meters of line attached to the animal).

Don'ts:

- Do not hit or slam a ray against any surface to remove the animal from the line.
- Do not attempt to dislodge a deeply hooked or ingested hook by pulling on the branch line or using a dehooker.
- Do not attempt to lift medium to large (>30 kg) rays aboard vessel.
- Do not cut the tail.
- Do not gaff, drag, carry, lift or pull a ray by its "cephalic lobes" or tail or by inserting hooks or hands into the gill slits or the spiracles.

Additional recommendation:

Knowing that any fishing operation may catch rays, several tools can be prepared in advance (e.g. canvas or net slings or stretchers for carrying or lifting, large mesh net or grid to cover hatches/hoppers in purse seine fisheries, long handled cutters and de-hookers in longline fisheries).