

Promoting responsible fish handling practices

A SHORT GUIDE



Developed by ABALOBI
in partnership with small-scale fishers

Small-scale fishers participating in the ABALOBI programme undertake to be ambassadors for responsible fishing practices.

This includes using the ABALOBI FISHER app to promote data-driven fisheries and committing to practising safe fish handling and release techniques.

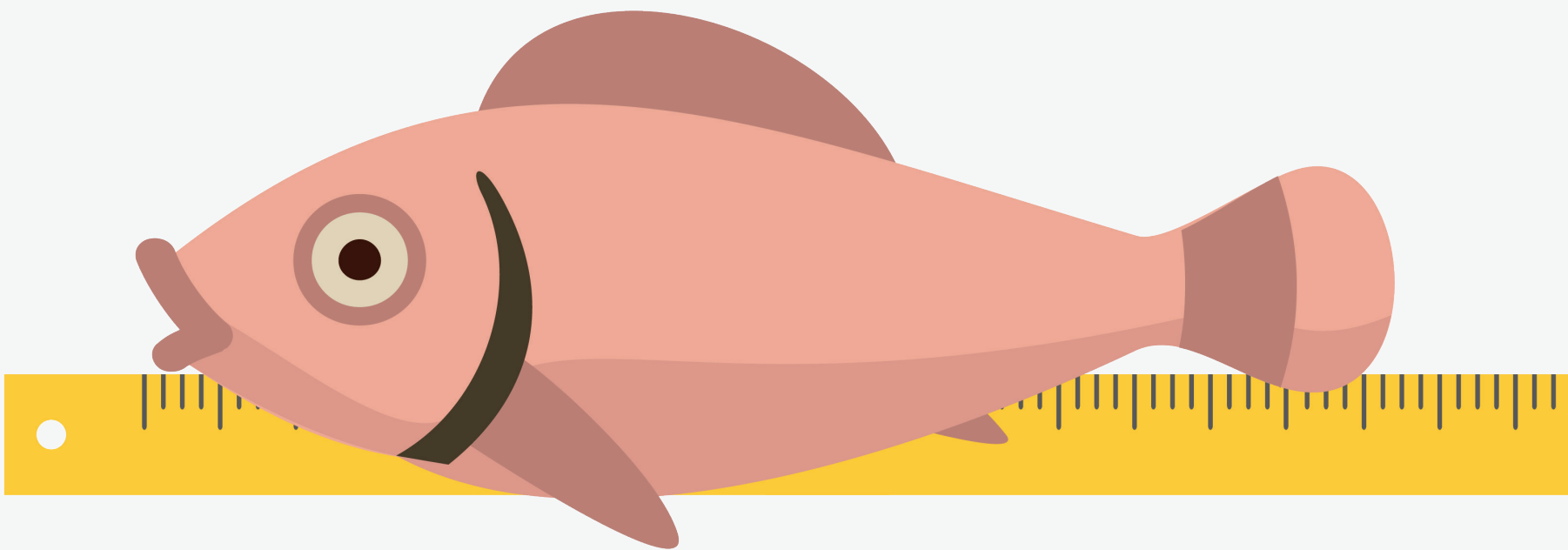


ABALOBI



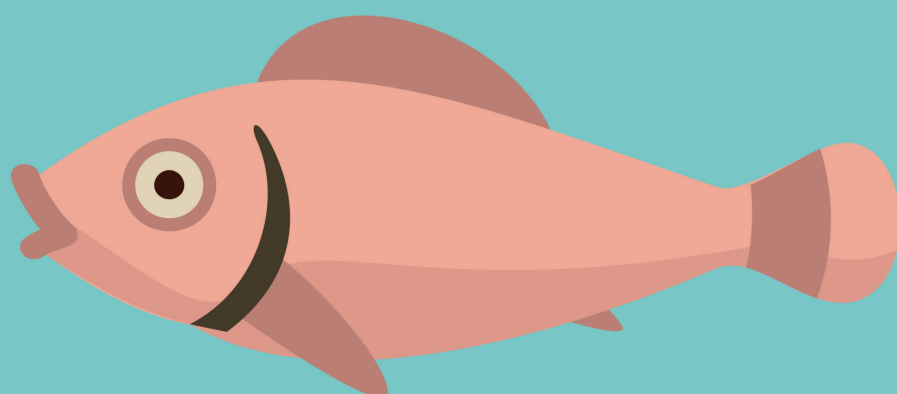
When should a fish be released?

Fish should be released safely if they are unwanted catch, undersized, out of season or a prohibited species. Be sure to check your permit conditions.



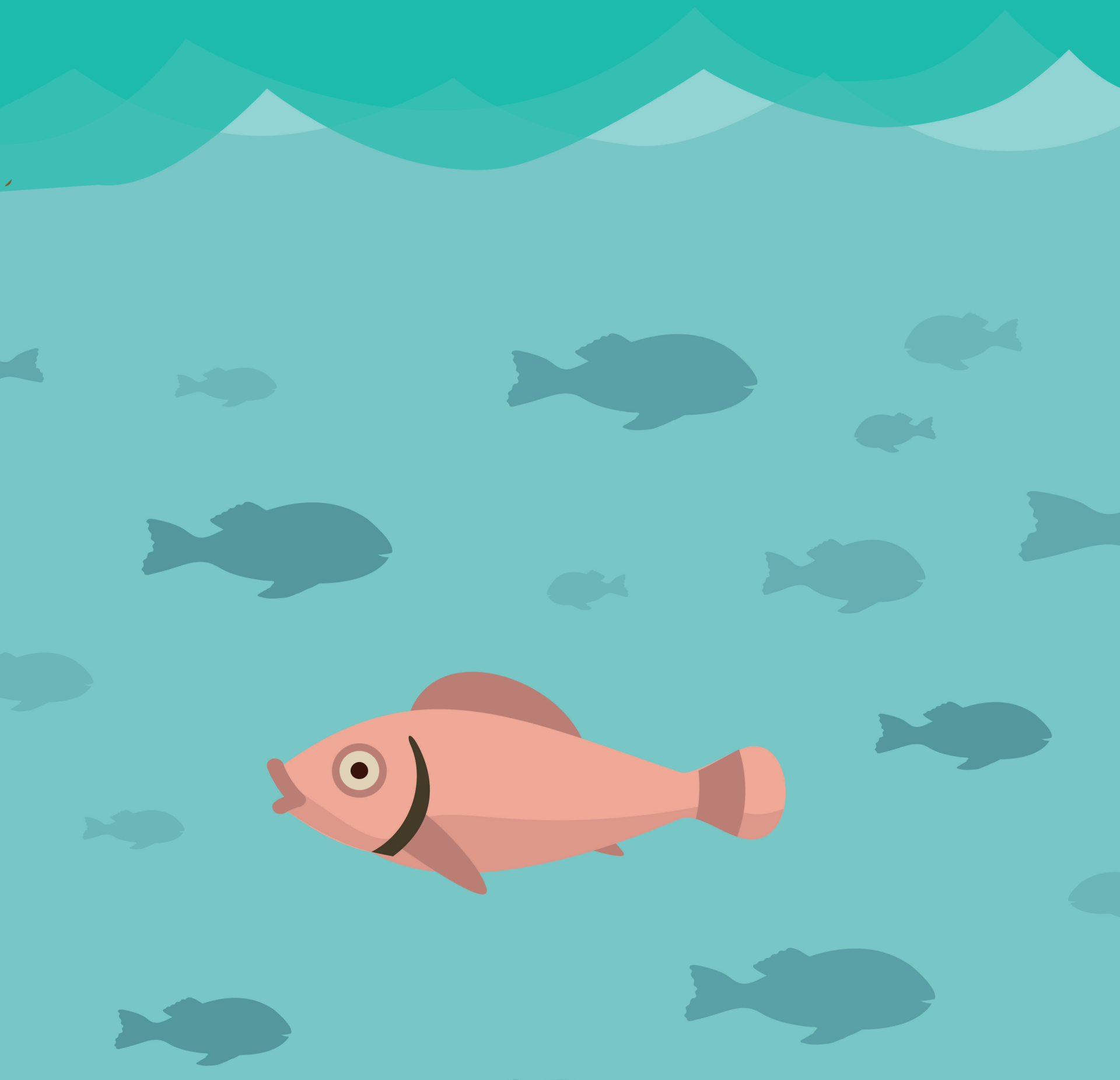
Why are responsible fish handling and release techniques important?

Every fish hooked should be handled responsibly to ensure that the fish has a better chance of survival if you need to release it back into the water; or to ensure that it retains its premium quality if harvested for sale or home consumption.



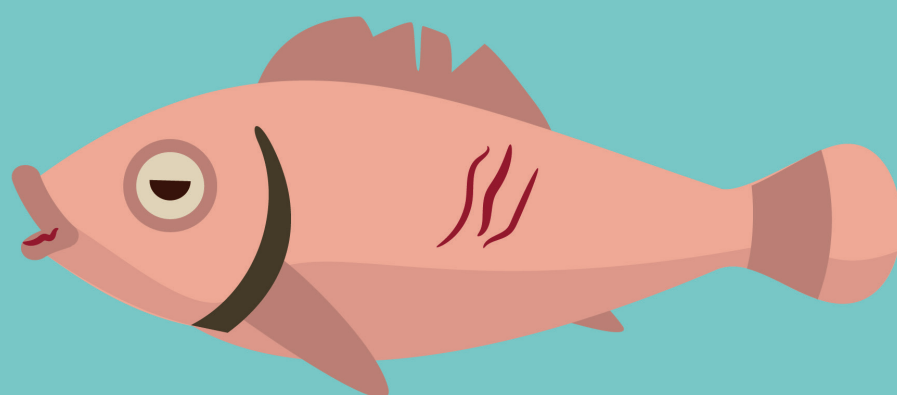
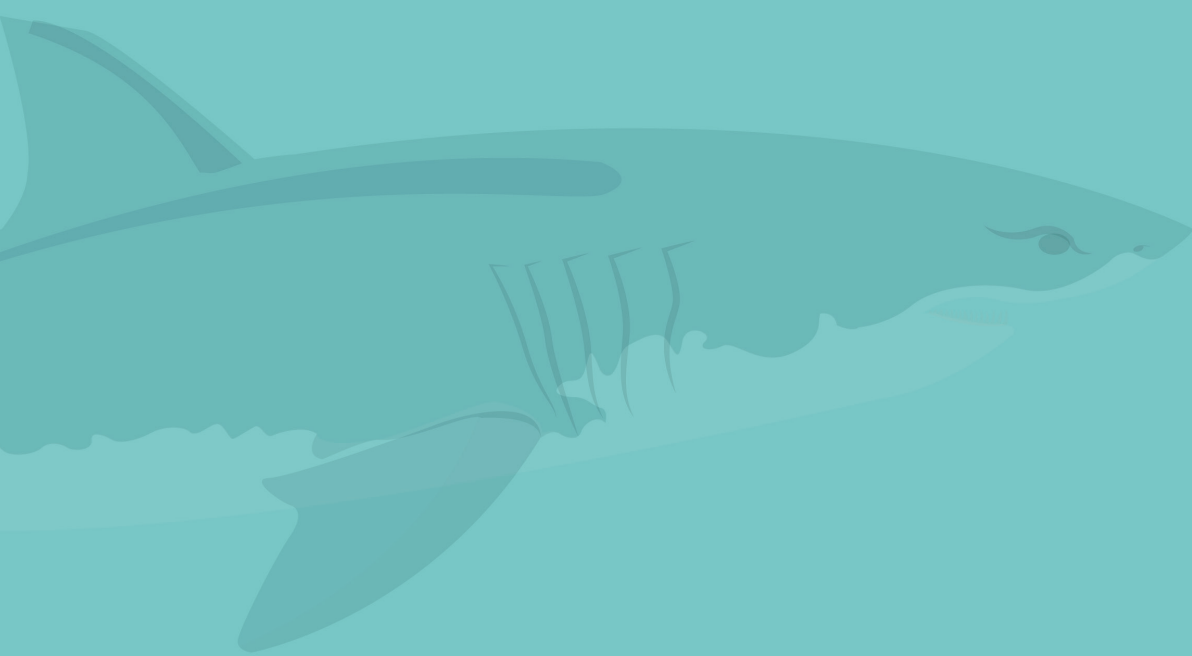
What is the benefit of releasing fish safely?

Practising and teaching responsible fish handling ensures that the next generation of fishers have fish to catch. It increases the chance of fish survival and ensures greater investment into future fish stocks.



What happens when fish are not released safely?

Injured fish have a lower chance of survival due to delayed recovery and greater vulnerability to predation, disease and sea conditions. Responsible fish handling practices ensure maximum investment into fish stocks, and greater health and diversity of the ecosystem in the long term.



What is best practice for releasing fish responsibly?

Use wet hands, wet gloves or a wet cloth when handling a fish. This protects the fish's skin so it isn't susceptible to disease. It will also protect you against the spines and scutes of the fish.



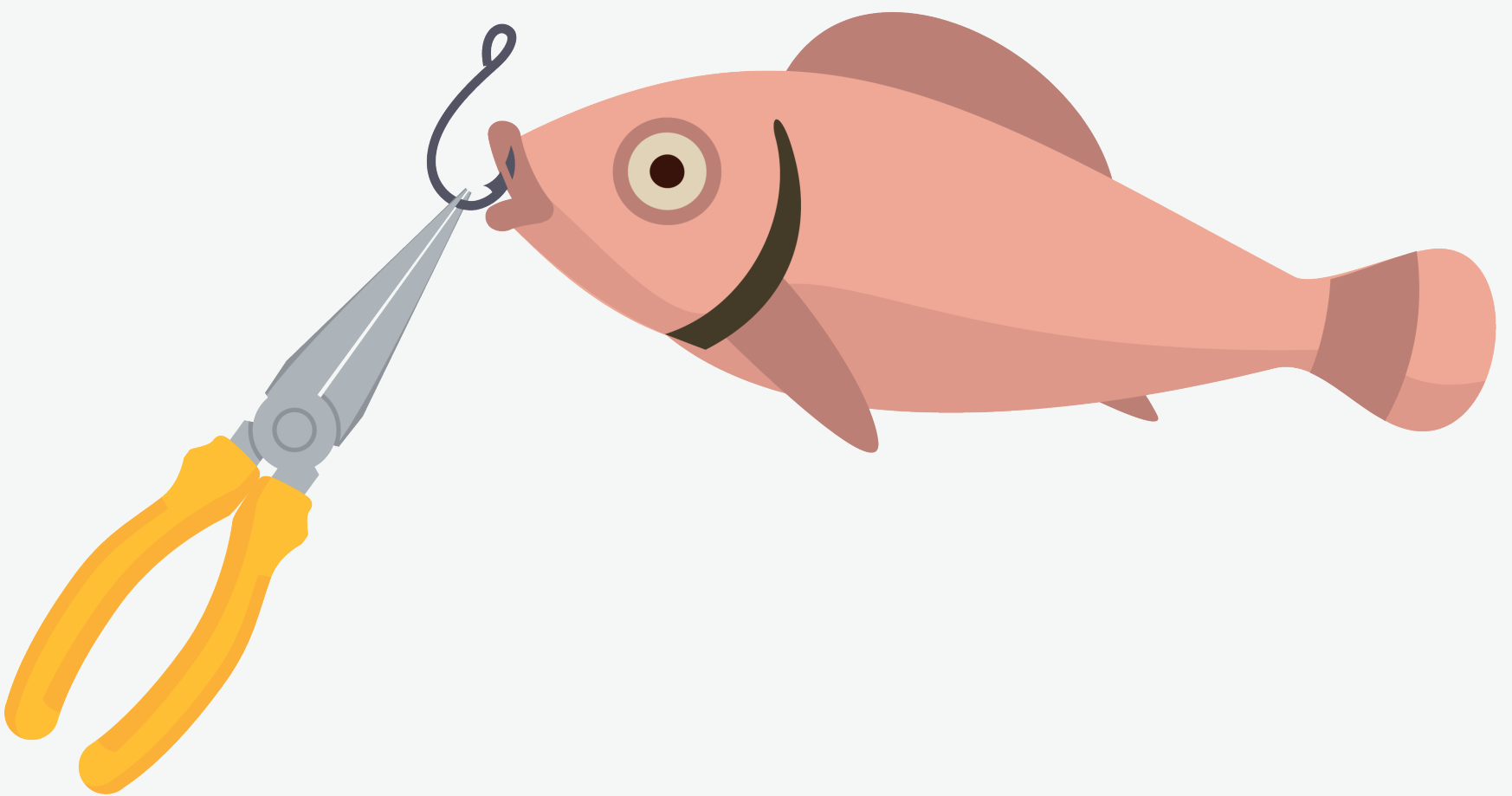
What is best practice for releasing fish responsibly?

Support the weight of the fish using both hands. Keep your fingers and hands clear from the gill plate.



What is best practice for releasing fish responsibly?

Work quickly and efficiently when removing a hook (use long-nose pliers). Getting the fish back into the water quickly will improve its chances of survival.



What is best practice for releasing fish responsibly?

If possible, keep the fish in the water or use a bucket filled with water while removing the hook. This decreases injury to the fish caused by flapping around.



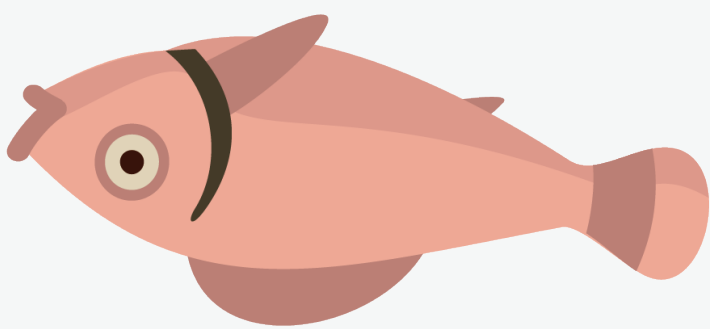
Practices to avoid when handling fish

Avoid injuring or hitting the fish with any object (e.g. club, rod or gaff) when trying to remove the hook.



Practices to avoid when handling fish

Avoid throwing the fish into the water when releasing it. Rather place the fish carefully back into the water.



Practices to avoid when handling fish

Avoid placing your fingers or hands under the gill plate when holding or releasing a fish; rather support the weight of the fish with both hands.



Practices to avoid when handling fish

Avoid pulling on the line to dislodge a swallowed hook. Rather use long-nose pliers or another suitable tool. If the hook is swallowed deep, then cut the line. You could also use circle hooks instead of J hooks. Circle hooks are designed to reduce hook swallowing.



J hook



Circle hook



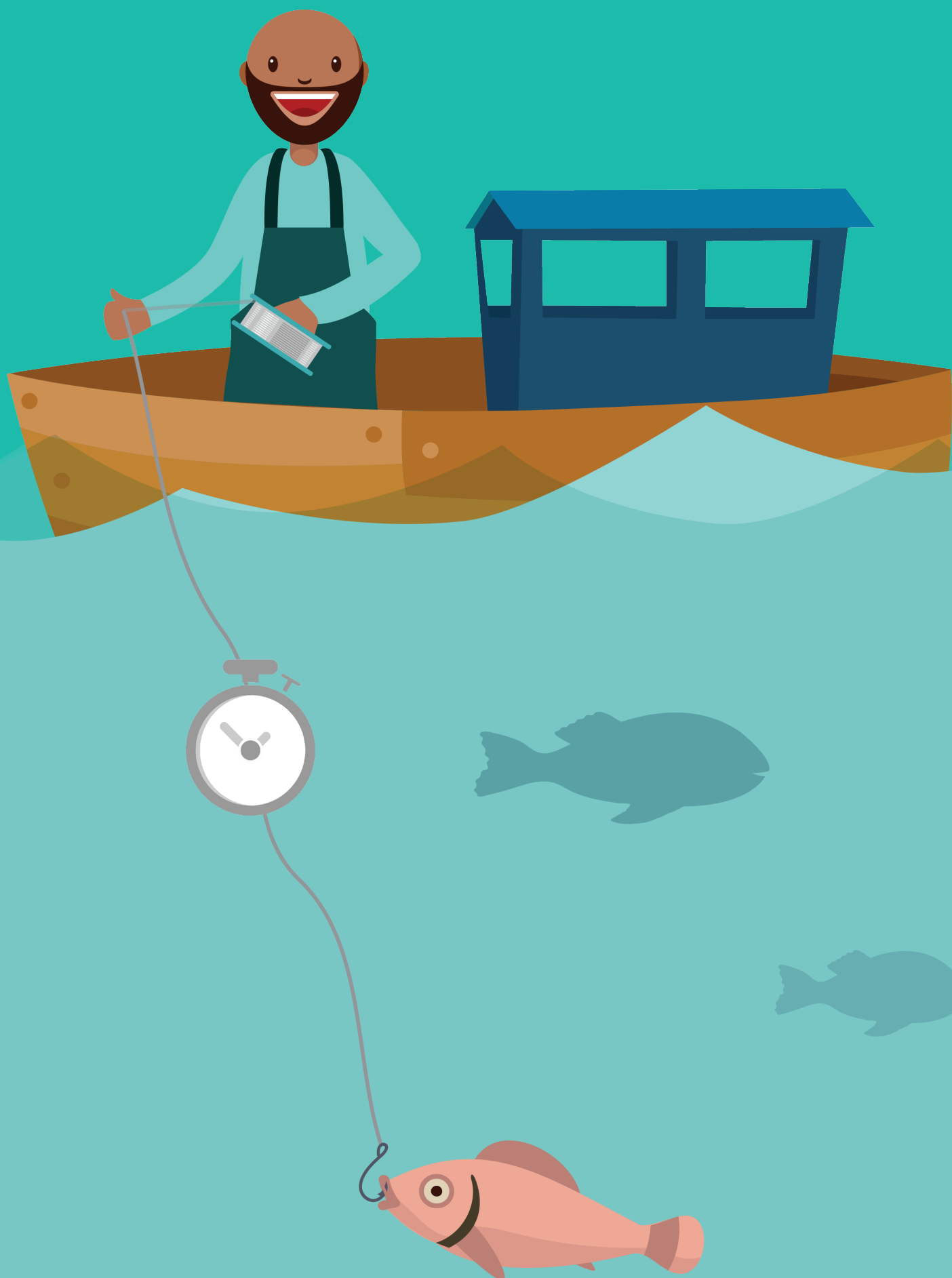
Practices to avoid when handling fish

Avoid discarding fishing line, hooks or any litter (such as cigarette stompies or plastic) into the water. This can lead to fish and other marine life dying when they get caught or trapped in the discarded rubbish.



Fish with barotrauma

Fish caught from deeper water can suffer barotrauma. The eyes bulge, and the swim bladder and other internal organs protrude. These fish can still be released safely by deflating the swim bladder with a syringe needle. Reduce barotrauma by reeling the fish in slower to maximise the time taken from bottom to surface.



Resources for more info

1. WWF South Africa. The Responsible Angler. Guidelines for responsible recreational fishing in South Africa. 2018. WWF South Africa, Cape Town.
2. Brownscombe JW, Danylchuk AJ, Chapman JM, Gutowsky LF, Cooke SJ. Best practices for catch-and-release recreational fisheries—angling tools and tactics. *Fisheries Research* 2017;186:693-705.
3. Kerwath SE, Wilke CG, Götz A. The effects of barotrauma on five species of South African line-caught fish. *African Journal of Marine Science* 2013;35(2):243-52.

“

**My wish is for every fisher to
become a responsible fisher.
To take ownership of the
ocean and the species in
the ocean, for the next
generation ...**

—

**DAVID SHOSHOLA
FISHER, LAMBERTSBAAI**