



Give released reef fish a better chance: FWC, American Sportfishing Association, Coastal Conservation Association Florida remind anglers to carry barotrauma mitigation tools to help conserve reef fish

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Starting April 1, anglers fishing from a vessel targeting reef fish will be required to have on board a descending device or venting tool that is rigged and ready for use to help conserve reef fish in state waters. This also requires the use of a descending device or venting tool if a fish is exhibiting signs of barotrauma prior to release.

The FWC approved this rule to increase the survival of released reef fish, a top priority management issue in both the Gulf and south Atlantic. As reef fish are reeled up from depth, they can suffer [pressure-related injuries known as barotrauma](#). These injuries include the stomach protruding out of the mouth, bulging eyes, bloated belly, distended intestines and inability to swim down independently. If not treated correctly, barotrauma can be lethal to fish. However, tools such as [descending devices](#) or [venting tools](#) can help released fish recover from the effects of barotrauma.

"Florida's anglers have always played an important role in the health of our fisheries and the proper use of barotrauma mitigation tools is just one way anglers continue helping to conserve Florida's fisheries for current and future generations," said **Jessica McCawley, Director of FWC's Division of Marine Fisheries Management**. "This new rule not only improves survival of released reef fish but also provides anglers the flexibility of choosing the best tool that fits their situation on the water."

"Giving reef fish a better chance at survival by properly using a descending device or venting tool to return them to the deep is an easy and simple step for anglers to take that will pay dividends for conservation and our economy," said **Gary Jennings, Director of Keep Florida Fishing for the American Sportfishing Association**. "We are grateful to our partners at FWC who are taking this step to act quickly and conserve Florida's reef fish."

"Barotrauma mitigation tools like descending devices and venting tools are important catch-and-release tools that recreational anglers, as the original conservationists, widely embrace," said **Trip Aukeman, Director of Advocacy of Coastal Conservation Association Florida**. "We support this important regulation and the potential it has to more efficiently conserve recreational fisheries going forward."

Descending devices are weighted devices capable of releasing fish at a depth that is sufficient to recompress expanded gas and help fish recover from the effects of barotrauma. Venting tools are sharp, hollow instruments that allow expanded gas to escape from an over-expanded swim bladder. Learn about barotrauma at MyFWC.com/Barotrauma. Find more information about reef fish gear requirements at MyFWC.com/ReefFishGear.

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