

Best Practices for Tarpon Catch & Release



BONEFISH & TARPON TRUST

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Best Practices for Tarpon Catch & Release

Hooks:

- When using live bait, use circle hooks- these usually catch the mouth of the fish, rarely deep in the throat or belly like J-hooks.
- For deep-set hooks, cut the line as close to the hook as possible. Tarpon can evict hooks over time.



Fight Time:

- Use tackle that matches the fish and conditions, and keep fight time short! Fight times over 30 – 40 minutes on adult tarpon will exhaust the fish and leave it vulnerable to predators. Fight times should be even shorter for smaller tarpon.

Predators:

- Tired fish are more vulnerable to predators like sharks. Avoid fishing in areas with high numbers of predators, and consider moving to another fishing location if predators are attracted by your activity. If you are fighting a tarpon when a shark appears, cut or break the line so the fish has a chance to escape.

Other Tips:

- Don't use a gaff; instead, carefully secure the fish in the water boat-side by hand or with a sling.
- Weight can be calculated using length and girth – use BTT's chart instead of lifting the fish out of the water.
- Minimize handling of the fish, avoid removing the fish's slime layer. The slime layer provides protection against bacteria and disease.
- Tired fish? Hold the tarpon upright until it recovers. If necessary, move the tarpon slowly forward to move water in the mouth and out of the gills from front to back. Wait until the fish can swim upright on its own before release, and shorten your fight time on the next fish.
- If the fish is larger than 40" or 1m fork length, do not remove it from the water. Take photos with the fish in the water, and keep boat-side time short.
- For smaller fish, in-water photos are still best. If the fish is removed from the water, minimize exposure of the fish to air. If the fish is not still dripping in the photo, it has been out of the water too long. Get the camera ready, and the photo set up before removing the fish from the water for the photo.

