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# A GUIDE TO SAFE HANDLING OF SHARKS, RAYS AND SKATES

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## Introduction

We are blessed with a high diversity and abundance of sharks, rays and skates in South Africa. Whether you actively target Elasmobranchs for catch-and-release angling or only encounter them occasionally on a fishing trip, it is important to know how to handle them.

That way you can reduce the chance of post-release mortality significantly and help to keep our shark populations healthy.

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## FAMILIARISE WITH FISHING REGULATIONS

*The fishing regulations can change every year so make sure that you are up-to-date. You can find some information on your fishing license, at local fishing clubs or you can visit the website of the [South African Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries](#) for the most recent version of the Recreational Fishing Brochure.*

Elasmobranchs that are currently (2015/2016) on the prohibited species list include:

- Basking shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*)
- Great white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*)
- Sawfishes (Family Pristidae)
- Whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*)

## USE THE RIGHT GEAR

*Make sure you are prepared for the right handling procedure and have all equipment on hand before you start angling.*

- Use strong fishing tackle to reduce fight time – never use a gaff
- Hooks:
  - ▶ Use hooks that will rust out if you are unable to remove them such as carbon or mild steel hooks – do not use stainless steel hooks
  - ▶ Use barbless circle hooks (flatten the barbs yourself if necessary)
  - ▶ Remove the hook when hooked in the throat (with a de-hooker)
  - ▶ Do not remove the hook if it was swallowed
  - ▶ If you cannot remove the hook, cut the line as close to the hook as possible
- Use a sling or stretcher
- Have recording material ready (forms, pencil, measuring stick or tape, camera)
- Keep Tags and applicator close
- Carry ID guides or a camera with your fishing gear



## ACT QUICKLY

*Elasmobranchs build up carbon dioxide and lactic acid in their tissues when fighting. And obviously they cannot breathe on land.*

- Make sure that you finish the handling as quickly as possible but do not compromise on care
- Never leave a shark in a small rock pool - release it back to where you caught it

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- If the Shark is tired by the time of release, run water across its gills or move it slowly forward in the water, facing into the current, to resuscitate

### TAKE CARE

*The vital organs of Elasmobranchs are not protected by a skeleton as we know it – out of the water they are easily injured or crushed. Their skin is sensitive to UV radiation and can easily get sunburned.*

- Do never lift a shark, skate or ray by its tail
- Do never lift an Elasmobranch by its gills (they are delicate and are easily injured)
- Try to work in the shallow water or use a stretcher or sling to support organs
- Try to avoid sun exposure and cover the shark with a wet cloth (soaked in seawater)
- Run water over the gill slits to oxygenate

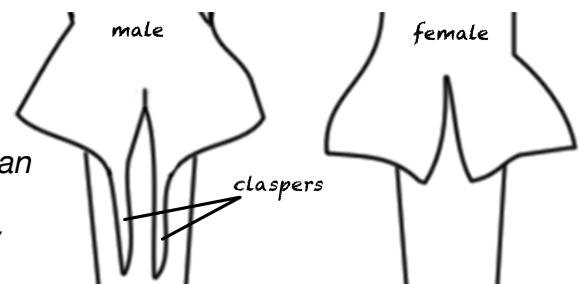
### BE SAFE

*Make sure you are always careful in how you approach a shark, skate or ray. The animal will be stressed out. Your personal safety is just as important as the animal's.*

- Take extra care when you move your hand close to the jaw e.g. when removing hook
- Cover the animal's eyes with a wet cloth to keep it calm
- Be especially careful with stingray tails: They can whip around and cause severe injuries

### GIVE IT A PURPOSE

*Getting hooked is generally not a pleasant experience for an Elasmobranch and always comprises a risk for the animal. So try to make it purposeful and contribute to research by tagging and recording. But don't forget to make it quick.*

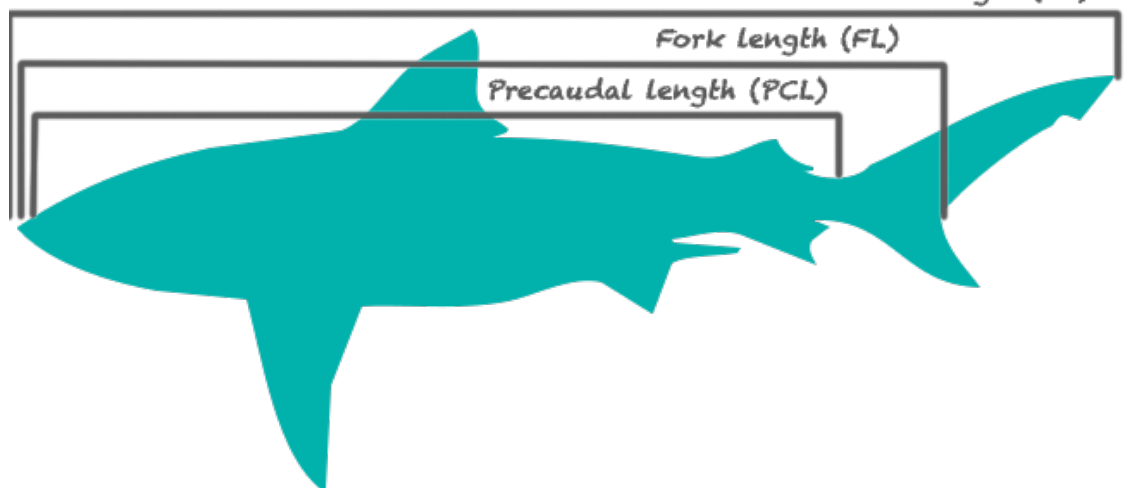
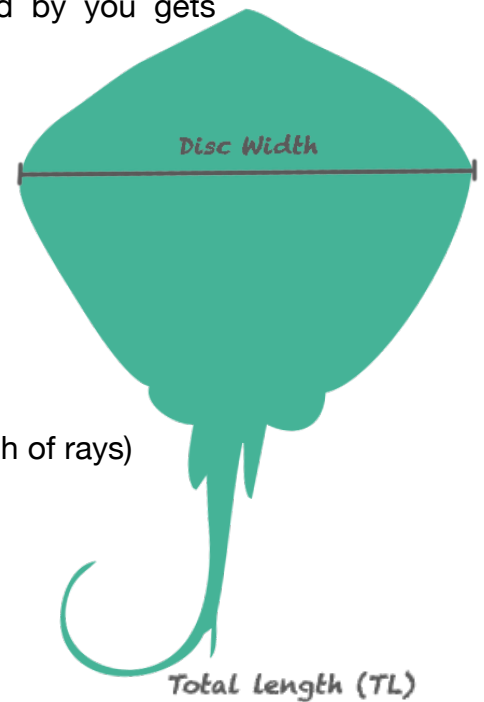


- Have recording forms and pencil ready
- Keep an identification guide in your toolbox
- Take pictures of unusual catches
- Take records: Use a measuring stick or tape to record the length of sharks or disc width of rays
- Do not weigh the animal if you want to release it: Length-weight conversion ratios can be used to estimate the weight of most common Elasmobranch species

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- Put a tag on it: ORI (Oceanographic Research Institute) is running a very successful tagging programme. Register with them as a responsible angler and you will get the reward: Whenever a shark, skate or ray that was tagged by you gets hooked again, you will be informed

### ***Other details that should be recorded***

- Time and date of capture
- Location and depth
- Water temperature and weather conditions
- Name, address, phone number
- Species and sex
- Length (pre-caudal length, fork length, total length, disc-width of rays)
- Weight (only if not released)
- Scars or other marks
- Capture gear and bait used
- Photograph (if applicable)
- Other observations



### ***References***

Fowler, S., Partridge, E. 2012. Guidelines for shark and ray recreational fishing in the Mediterranean. UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA.

Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. 2014. Marine Recreational Activity Information Brochure 2014/2015.