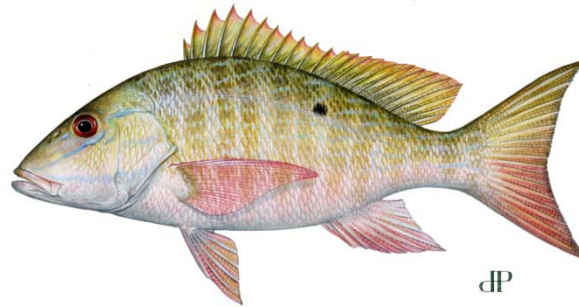


New Regulations Requiring Dehooking Devices for Reef Fish in South
Atlantic Federal Waters
Effective July 29, 2009
Frequently Asked Questions
July 2009



New Regulatory Requirements

What are the new reef fish gear regulations for federal waters of the South Atlantic?

- The regulations will require the use of dehooking devices when fishing for reef fish in federal waters of the South Atlantic.

Why are these new regulations needed?

- The intent of these new regulations is to reduce bycatch and discard mortality of reef fish that are caught and not kept. Proper use of dehooking devices will help more reef fish survive when they are released.

When do these new regulations take effect?

- The regulations take effect July 29, 2009; however, many commercial fishers and recreational anglers are already using dehooking devices in Atlantic waters off Florida.

Who must comply with these regulations?

- These regulations apply to all commercial and recreational fishermen fishing for reef fish in federal waters of the South Atlantic.

What do bycatch and discard mean?

- Bycatch is defined in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act as “fish which are harvested in a fishery, but which are not sold or kept for personal use, and includes economic discards and regulatory discards. The term does not include fish released alive under a recreational catch and release fishery management program.”
- Economic discards are “fish which are the target of a fishery, but which are not retained because of an undesirable size, sex, or quality, or other economic reason.”
- Regulatory discards are “fish harvested in a fishery which fishermen are required by regulation to discard whenever caught, or are required by regulation to retain but not sell.”

Dehooking Devices

What is a dehooking device?

- A dehooking device is a tool intended to remove a hook embedded in a fish. It allows a fish to be released with minimum damage.
- The hook removal device must be constructed to allow the hook to be secured and the barb shielded without re-engaging during the removal process.
- The dehooking end must be blunt, and all edges rounded.
- The device must be of a size appropriate to secure the range of hook sizes and styles used in the reef fish fishery.
- At least one dehooking device is required when fishing for reef fish in South Atlantic federal waters and must be used to remove hooks embedded in reef fish with minimum damage.
- However, it may be safer for the fish and the angler to cut the line rather than trying to remove a deeply imbedded hook, which will occur less often with a circle hook.

What are appropriate dehooking devices to comply with the new South Atlantic reef fish regulations?

- Examples of allowable dehooking devices include tools with a long shaft with an inverted-V or other hook capturing device, blunt-nosed pliers, alligator pliers, or dehooking forceps.
- Examples of what not to use include knives, screwdrivers, sharp-nosed wire cutters or pliers.
- Note: While pliers and forceps can be used as a dehooking device, the use of dehooking tools that can grab the fishing line, slide down the line, and remove the hook quickly are encouraged because these tools require minimal handling of the fish and are better able to secure the hook during removal.

If a fish has swallowed a hook and removing it with a dehooker would do more than minimal damage to the fish, can I just cut the line?

- Yes, it may be safer for the fish to simply cut the line as close to the hook as possible on deeply embedded hooks rather than use the dehooking device.
- A good rule of thumb is to use a dehooker if you can see the hook. If you cannot see the hook, cut the leader as close to the hook as possible without removing the fish from the water.
- Note: Some dehookers are designed to remove swallowed hooks (e.g., ARC and Safe Dehooker), so you may want to consider carrying this type of device in addition to other dehooking devices.

Where can I find a dehooking device for sale?

- Dehooking devices can be found in many stores that sell fishing gear and on the Worldwide Web.