

Loch Venachar

CATCH & RELEASE – BEST PRACTISE

It is the responsibility of the fishery manager to ensure that **ALL** anglers using Loch Venachar are supplied with these guidelines, have the appropriate equipment to fulfil the possible scenarios outlined and if in breach of them then are prohibited from fishing the water again.

- When fighting any fish **it is better to play a fish hard** and fast and perhaps loose one or two than it is to gently easy it in to the boat/shore. The reason for this is a fast/hard played fish does not have its long-term energy levels depleted so much and evidence strongly suggests they recover from stress hormones and lactic acid far quicker as a result.
- **Always fish as heavy gear as is appropriate**, given modern tackle there really is no reason to have fish snap you off regularly. Strong gear/rigs will allow you to fight fish in the appropriate manner outlined above.
- **Know your species**. It is the responsibility of the angler to know what he might be catching and how to handle different species. There are dangers of handling both pike and perch.
- Best practice however is to **get all fish back as quickly as possible**.
- If catch and release is being practised, then consideration should be given to using **barbless or crushed barb hooks**.
- Consideration should be given to **replacing treble hooks with large single hooks where possible**.
- If bait fishing, then where appropriate **circle hooks should be used if appropriate to avoid deep hooking**.
- **Make sure you have the right tools** to hand to deal with the fish.

These might include:-

- Forceps (of various sizes) for hook removal
- Gloves for handling some fish
- A knotless net large enough for realistic size of capture.
- Wire/bolt cutters to cut trace if required
- Unhooking mat if the fish is to be brought onto a terrestrial surface.
- Hook disgorging if dealing with small hooks and small species
- Slings are a very effective method of handling fish and keeping them calm whilst also keeping them in the water.
- Keep nets are not to be used under advice from the Angling Trust
- Lip grips are also to be used only on species that have dangerous mouths and are a last resort.
- If an angler has been fishing other waters **ALL EQUIPEMENT MUST BE DRIED FOR 48hrs** before fishing Loch Venachar or must be **DISINFECTED** at the loch side, unless the water fished prior is part of the Forth Catchment area.

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- If at all possible it is best to **keep the fish in the water at all times**. If a quick photos is required then keep the fishing in the net in clear water, get the shot set up, then on a count of three quickly raise the fish out of the water, well supported and not too far above the surface and then lower back into clean water after **no more than 5 seconds**. This may be extended on the advice of the local expert / guide.
- **Always keep the fish well supported**, the best method for this is to have one hand around the wrist of the tail (the caudal peduncle) and the other just behind the head with the forearm of that hand running along the belly for further support. Where appropriate use a pre-wetted unhooking mat to rest the fish on.
- **Hands must always be wet** before handling fish so as to protect the mucus/slim that acts as a protective barrier to the fishes skin from water born pathogens. This is the case with all equipment that is to come in contact with the fish e.g. net and unhooking mat.
- **Never put a fish down on rough abrasive surfaces** like rock.
- **Never hold a fish supported by just its tail** out of the water as if it “kicks” it might damage its spine.
- **Never hold a fish by just its mouth**. There is a tendency for trophy shots to be posed holding specimens horizontal by the mouth. This damages the spinal cord. Where appropriate you can chin a medium sized pike, however it is always the recommendation to net the fish.
- Always keep the fish as **close to the water as possible**, do not lift it high into the air at any stage as if it kicks free it will seriously damage itself. Kneeling for trophy shots of fish is recommended, rather than risking dropping a fish from height if standing, especially on a boat which might be moving or unsteady.
- Always move **slowly and calmly**, this again helps keep the stress levels of the fish to a minimum.
- If a large fish is being handled and the handling will take some time then placing a **WET** black fish skin friendly material over the eyes will help keep the fish calm. To this end always **beware of the fishes head, keep any damaging objects away from the eyes and make sure the fishes gills can freely move and are in clean water at all times**.
- Check the welfare of the fish before release. If the fish is bleeding due to an **injury to the gills** it is best to consult the local expert/guide as to how to proceed. It is often kindest to dispatch a fish with these injuries quickly and cleanly. This should be reported to management.
- When releasing a fish it is important to **fully revive the fish before releasing it**. This requires holding the fish well supported by the tail and belly, in clear (no silt or mud) water. Slowly moving the fish in a forward direction (not rocking it back and forth) will help pass clean water over the gills.
- **DO NOT** release the fish until it has kicked confidently and can support itself upright in the water. It is absolutely imperative the fish swims away being able to support

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itself fully. Be prepared with a net to recapture a fish that goes belly-up or sinks and to spend longer waiting for it to recover.

- **Watch out for potential predators** before release, as released fish are highly vulnerable to attack.
- Keep an eye on the water temperature. If the water is abnormally warm the fish sometimes will take an abnormally long time to revive (sometimes over an hour!) It is best practice to STOP FISHING when waters are above safe return limits. This is recommended when the surface water exceeds 21 degrees C.
- Keep nets are not to be used under advice from the Angling Trust' change to 'where keep nets are deemed necessary to retain captures for a short while they must be of sufficient length and made of soft fish friendly material'
- If fishing for salmon then small mesh nets are best practice and it is also very important to keep them in the water unless absolutely necessary to remove them. Time spent out of the water contributes significantly to reducing mortality post-release.

Angler safety

- Some fish have sharp teeth, spines and gill rakers on their bodies. These can cause severe injury to angler's hands if they are not aware of them. It is the responsibility of the angler to know the species.
- Key areas of the fish to watch out for are mouth and teeth, fins are a likely spot for spines, gills are sometimes armed with sharp rakers.
- It is recommended that anglers wear protective eye ware at all times.