



BAC voluntary code of conduct for targeting large sharks by rod and line.

Bembridge Angling Club is committed to preserving our member's continued enjoyment of targeting large sharks, on a catch and release only basis, by using appropriate tackle and techniques.

The following extensive voluntary code/information aims to guide BAC members in best practice when catching, handling and releasing large sharks in order to minimise post-release mortality. (For reference, BAC members typically fish from private vessels belonging to club members). This is based on using the appropriate tackle to strike a good balance between sporting enjoyment and minimising fight time, plus releasing the fish unharmed at the side of the boat without bringing it onboard.

Targeting large and powerful sharks should not be undertaken without a thorough understanding of the associated issues involved, including that special tackle and procedures need to be employed and the cost required to invest in the correct tackle.

It is acknowledged that anglers may unintentionally hook large sharks whilst fishing for species other than sharks. Under such circumstances, we recommend that the angler considers what is in the best interest of the shark and adopt the most appropriate fighting recommendations listed below, plus considering holding on for a line break at the earliest opportunity if the tackle being used is so light as to afford minimal chance of bringing the shark alongside in a reasonable time frame, if at all.

Sharks are more susceptible to injury than many anglers realise. Once removed from the water, their gills and internal organs are easily damaged because they are not protected by an internal skeleton. There is a significant risk that injury to their spinal column and internal organs may occur if they are removed from the water onto a boat's deck, so this should not be attempted.

Sharks play an essential part in regulating our oceans' ecological structure and function. In order to maintain healthy shark populations, it is imperative that, when hooked, they are handled correctly and appropriately released to minimise harm and post-release mortality.

A. Personal Safety: We have been experiencing some very large sharks in our waters, and of course, they can only be targeted from a boat, so the first consideration is that the size and construction of the boat needs to be sufficiently large to afford plenty of working room and, even more importantly, needs to be able to handle the sea conditions experienced in our local waters. When combined with adverse wind conditions, our local strong tides can produce rough sea conditions, so a minimum of a 7m long vessel is recommended. Slightly smaller boats may be ok on days of very light winds, but a good understanding of diurnal onshore and offshore wind conditions related to land vs sea temperatures is essential, along with access to very reliable and current wind forecasts. Trips should be planned in conjunction with tide times bearing in mind that sea conditions will be significantly rougher when there is a wind blowing in the opposite direction to the tide flow than when the wind blows in the same direction. Such effects will be stronger on spring tides than on neaps.

B. Use The Correct Gear:

a) Line: The fact that we do not see blue sharks in our waters means that we are only targeting very large species that have been reported as being encountered in weights up to 500 lbs. It is vital for the shark's wellbeing that fight times do not regularly go above one hour, so appropriate strengths of rods and lines must be used. 50 lbs breaking strain line is an absolute minimum, and up to 80 lbs would not be unreasonable. Choice of mono or braid mainline is down to personal preference. Braid has the advantage of more of it being able to be loaded onto a reel than the same breaking strain of mono, but it can easily bed down and get trapped in the lower layers of line under extreme tension if not correctly loaded on the reel to start with.

b) Rods: Normal convention is that a pressure equivalent to about 30% of the line's breaking strain needs to be capable of being applied by the rod. So if using 50 lb line that is c17 lbs and for 80 lb line that is c27lbs. Many general-purpose rods sold for UK anglers have vastly differing capabilities even if claimed to be suitable for use with the same rated line. Few, if any, general-purpose rods that are rated suitable for 50 lb or 80 lb line can actually apply the 17 lbs or 27 lbs pressure. Specialist rods designed for big game angling are recommended since they will be able to apply pressure correctly. Those fitted with good quality roller guides throughout are advised as the guides minimise friction on the line, which could otherwise cause the line to break during long runs under extreme pressure. Such rods are generally available in two varieties related to the methods used originally by foreign big game anglers. One variety is termed "Trolling" and is a similar length rod to UK general-purpose rods. The other variety is termed "Stand Up". It is a much shorter rod which allows the angler to exert more pressure on the line and results in considerably less strain on the angler than with trolling rods due to issues related to lever effects. Better quality rods of either type come equipped with the butt section of the rod below the reel being formed with some hard, smooth surface that enables the rod to be easily removed from rod holders when under pressure from a hooked fish. Suitable good quality rods will cost somewhere between £150 and £300+

c) Reels: Good quality reels must be used that are capable of holding a minimum of 500m of the chosen line strength and type. Their drag strength capability should also be rated to apply the appropriate tension in the line. Conventional star drag reels, especially those with the normal relatively small diameter drag components, are not recommended since, during long runs under pressure, extreme heat build-up in their drag components can result in drag failure, including parts melting. Good quality lever drag reels from reputable manufacturers are recommended since their large drag washer area dissipates heat more efficiently, along with other advantages. Such reels do not come cheap, and new ones can cost from £400 upwards. Ongoing availability of spare parts should be considered. More affordable reels from obscure manufacturers are not recommended. Lever drag reels should have their drag set according to line strength being used with the drag lever in the strike position and the spool filled with the line to be used. When so set, the drag lever should be capable of being set to maximum without any significant resistance to turning the handle. Reputable reel manufacturers provide information as to what drag pressure their individual models are capable of exerting.

d) Traces: There are two elements to the requirements for traces. One is to resist abrasion from the shark's rough skin if the trace comes into contact with it, and the other is to resist the cutting action of the shark's teeth adjacent to the hook inside its jaw. One option is to use a trace consisting entirely of wire of a length slightly longer than the maximum anticipated overall shark length to be encountered. 1.5mm diameter multi-strand stainless rigging wire is common despite single strand wire being commonly used in the US. Anglers may wish to consider if they are comfortable with the possibility of a shark swimming around with such a trace hanging from its jaw in the event that the line breaks during a fight. Another option is to use only a very short length of wire (up to ½ m) to the hook with the other end attached to a length of heavy monofilament line of 400 lbs to 500 lbs to a total length as above. The relatively neutral buoyancy of the mono should not affect the shark's ability to swim naturally in the event of a break-off. If used, swivels should be of very high quality and those with internal ball bearings are highly recommended. Optional special "wind-on" leaders (alternative name for trace) provide the benefit of being able to retrieve a good portion of the heavy trace through the rod guides and onto the reel as they eliminate the need for a swivel between the main line and the trace.

e) Hooks: Stainless hooks should not be used due to the excessive amount of time they would take to corrode away if a fish is left with one in it due to breakage etc. A hook with a tinned or bronzed finish will eventually rust and fall out, and, if gut hooked, the shark's stomach digestive acids would dissolve a non-stainless hook in around 3 to 4 days. Barbless or filed down barbed hooks are much easier to remove than barbed ones. Very strong patterns of hooks need to be employed as there is every chance that ordinary patterns such as O'Shaughnessey that is often used for general fishing will straighten out under the load of a large shark even if using very large sizes. Mustad Seamaster and Sea Demon are reliable, but other makes specifically designed for sharks are also suitable.

There are two basic hook shapes with variations of each available. One shape goes by the generic description of the "J" shape. That is where the hook's portion from the bend to the point is roughly parallel to the shank. The other goes by the generic description of "Circle". As its name suggests, that is for where the point section of the hook curves round towards the shank.

Different fishing techniques are required according to which type of hook is used.:-

"J" hooks: These require a technique known here in the UK as "fishing on strike". The rod is set up in a very strong, rocket launcher type rod holder, and the reel is set such that the line can only be pulled off once a strong tension is applied to it by the fish (up to 17 lbs when using 50 lbs line and up to 27 lbs when using 80 lbs line). This should result in the fish being properly hooked in the jaw as soon as it runs away from the boat, and this prevents gut hooking that can occur if a fish is allowed to run with no tension on the line.

“Circle” hooks: These require a totally different technique whereby the fish is allowed to run with initially no tension on the line. Whilst the fish is running the reel drag is then slowly increased up to the maximum preset level as described above. This should result in the hook pulling out through the internals of the fish until it penetrates the outer jaw, generally in the scissors. This technique needs much practice to learn and become confident with but is preferred by many experienced shark anglers.

f) Butt pads etc.: Given the target of not usually exceeding 1 hour fight time for even the largest of sharks, the angler must be able to sustain maximum pressure on the fish at all times. To that end, specialist butt pads and associated harnesses are vital. The load imparted by the rod butt through the butt pad must be distributed over a large surface area of the angler’s body to minimise pressure pain, so small butt pads designed for light general fishing are far from suitable. Specialist harnesses are also recommended as these enable the angler to exert pressure on the rod via the harness clips which are clipped onto lugs on the reel, thereby reducing the strain on the angler’s arms. These harnesses can be “shoulder” harnesses where they fit over the angler’s shoulder but, if properly used, “kidney “ harnesses, based on a broad waist strap, tend to be less tiring to use.

C. Fighting Technique: Our very large sharks are difficult to control when first hooked. At that time one would normally start the boat’s engine and retrieve any other lines that may be in the water and store the rods clear of the gunwales. Ideally, one would wish the fish to run away from the boat, and the aim would normally be to keep the fish off the stern of the boat by at least 100m to allow time to position the boat relative to the fish to minimise the chances of the fish fouling the line on the boat’s hull etc. If a fish does not run but, instead, stays near to the boat, then motoring the boat away from the fish is the sensible thing. The fish will likely put in several strong runs, which may be for some considerable distance, especially if it is a large Thresher, but the angler should not be tempted to increase the reel drag above the preset level. On the contrary, if a fish runs a lot of line off the reel, that effectively significantly increases the drag imparted by the reel and consideration may be needed to be given to back off the lever somewhat and only return it to the preset drag position once a good proportion of the line is retrieved. Ideally, whoever is driving the boat should aim to keep it pointing directly away from the fish whilst also always maintaining full pressure on the line. Good communication from the angler is essential to keep the skipper informed of the fish’s movements. There may be occasions when the skipper needs to reverse the boat towards the fish if it runs too far, and it may also be necessary to go forward if the fish runs towards the boat and gets too close. With experience, it should be possible for the angler to assess when the fish is sufficiently “played” so as to be safe to start drawing it towards the boat in anticipation of its release. This should never normally be more than one hour from hook-up for even very large fish.

D. Release: Experience has shown that once such large fish have been brought close to the boat at the end of the fight, it is best to keep the boat moving forward slowly on tick-over with the fish being led alongside the boat like walking a dog. This technique reduces the tendency for the fish to swim all over the place, which would otherwise make release difficult. Doing this for several minutes before release increases the supply of oxygen to the fish’s gills and thus increases its prospects for a full recovery. This period can be used for taking photos of the fish. Never attempt to bring the shark onto the boat. Instead, release it in the water at the side of the boat: Bring the shark alongside the boat using just the fishing tackle being used. Do not use a gaff or tailer to help bring it closer. Use a de-hooking tool to remove the hook. Never wrap the heavy trace around a hand in order to hold on to it, and always use very strong gloves to prevent personal injury due to either the fish pulling the trace harder than it can be held on to or the fish attempting to bite. If the shark has been deeply hooked, then cut the trace as close to the hook as is safely possible. Do not hold the shark by the gills, as this can lead to severe injury and even death.

E. Catch reporting: By cooperating with the collection and collating of reports of both captures and effort (numbers of trips), members can contribute significantly to the understanding of the year on year population trends without having any significant adverse impact in terms of mortality.

F. Conclusion: Adherence to the above should minimise any adverse impact on our populations of large sharks and will aid maintaining the fishery for the future.