

## **BEST PRACTICES FOR SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS IN LONGLINE FISHERIES**

The following are guidelines for best handling practices of marine mammals, specifically cetaceans, for longline vessels fishing for tuna and tuna-like species in the Pacific Ocean:

### **GENERAL PROVISIONS:**

*Once a cetacean is observed, the captain should be notified immediately, hauling should be ceased, and the crew should be ready to help, have the proper equipment on hand and know what to do.*

Safety First: These guidelines should be considered in light of safety and practicability for crew. Crew safety should always come first. Cetaceans can be very powerful and hooked or entangled cetaceans can be unpredictable, therefore it is not safe to enter the water in order to release an animal.

Quick Release: For all gear types, keep animals in the water whenever possible. Removing a cetacean from the water is extremely stressful for the animal and can cause injury, so they should be released in the water. When handling cetaceans, it is always best to have two or more people engaged.

Suggested Equipment: Vessels should have equipment on board to facilitate the release of cetaceans. For longline vessels, suggested equipment includes long-handled cutters and de-hookers.

### **FOR LARGE CETACEANS (*baleen whales and sperm whales*) :**

1. Large cetaceans should remain in the water.
2. Do not attempt to release large cetaceans by having crew in the water.
3. Maneuver vessel to minimize tension on the fishing gear.
4. Release the animal as quickly as possible, without jeopardizing the safety of the crew.

### **FOR SMALL CETACEANS (*all toothed whales other than sperm whales*):**

#### **Do's:**

1. Determine if the animal is hooked or entangled and prepare to remove the line.
  - a. If entangled: Maneuver the vessel in a way that will reduce tension on the line and then use a long-handled line cutter to cut as much line off of or as close to the animal as you can.
  - b. If hooked:

- i. Determine whether the hook is ingested or not. If the hook appears to be ingested, maneuver vessel in a way that will reduce tension on the line and then use a long-handled line cutter to cut the line as close to the hook as possible, removing as much gear as possible
- ii. If the hook is not ingested:
  1. If using “weak<sup>1</sup>” circle hooks:
    - a. maintain tension on the line, giving the hook a chance to straighten and release the animal without the hook or trailing line attached.
    - b. If the hook does not straighten, use a de-hooker to remove the hook and trailing line.
    - c. If the hook is not straightened or removed, use a long-handled line cutter to cut the line as close as you can to the hook, removing as much gear as possible.
  2. If not using “weak” circle hooks: Avoid pulling sharply on the branchline. Maneuver vessel in a way that will reduce tension on the line and then use a long-handled line cutter to cut the line as close to the hook as possible, removing as much gear as possible .

**Don'ts:**

1. Do not handle the animal in any way that could cause harm.
  - a. Do not use gaffs or sharp objects to grab, move, or hold an animal.
  - b. Do not cover or block the blowhole, or spray water in or near it, to allow uninterrupted breathing.
  - c. Do not push, pull or lift by tail, flippers, fins, flukes or beaks.
  - d. Do not drag or pull the cetacean underwater in a manner that prevents it from surfacing to breathe.

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<sup>1</sup> Circle hooks with a wire diameter of 4.5 mm or less with an offset not exceeding 10 degrees.

**References:**

*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Good Practice Guide for the Handling of Cetaceans Caught Incidentally in Mediterranean Fisheries.*

*Hamer, D. and Minton, G. (2020). Guidelines for the safe and humane handling and release of bycaught small cetaceans from fishing gear. UNEP/CMS Secretariat. Bonn, Germany 50 pages. CMS Technical Series No. 43.*

*National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Protected Species Workshop Handling, Release, and Identification Guidelines. NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office.*

*NMFS. Marine mammal handling/release guidelines: A quick reference for Atlantic pelagic longline gear. NMFS/ARFO Marine Mammal Handling Guidelines. NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office.*