

# Laws for Handling Billfish

## *(NMFS-HMS Recreational Compliance Guide 2015)*

An Atlantic billfish that is caught but not kept must be released immediately to improve its chances of survival without removing it from the water.



### CFR (Code of Federal Regulations)

#### **§635.21 Gear operation, restricted areas, and deployment restrictions.**

(a) *All Atlantic HMS fishing gears.*

- (1) An Atlantic HMS harvested from its management unit that is not retained must be released in a manner that will ensure maximum probability of survival, but without removing the fish from the water.
- (2) If a billfish is caught by a hook and not retained, the fish must be released by cutting the line near the hook or by using a dehooking device, in either case without removing the fish from the water.

### Suggestions for how to handle billfish

(Based on Billfish Scientific Research)



1. Do not remove the fish from the water, even for a picture. (Removal from water reduces survival rates by 60-80%)
2. Use dehooking devices to remove hook. If hook cannot be removed, cut the leader as close to the hook as possible.
3. Use circle hooks. The fish is usually hooked in the jaw or corner of the mouth, making it easier to remove the hook and less harmful to the fish.
4. Revive the fish by keeping it in the water, place boat in gear and have oxygenated water pass over the gills.

**A properly handled billfish has a 85 - 90% survival rate after being released.**