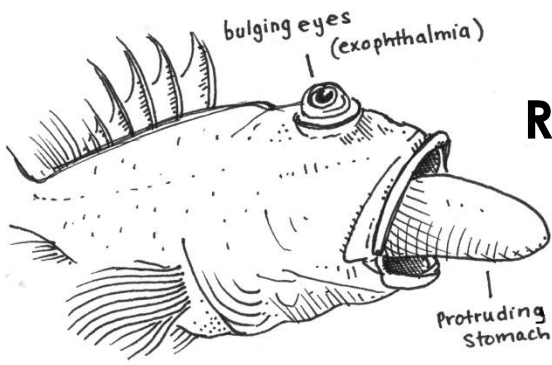


The Ucluelet Aquarium's Guide to Rockfish Barotrauma and Recompression



A rockfish affected by barotrauma

Rockfish, sometimes called "snapper" or "rock cod," are truly amazing fish. These slow-growing animals can live for over 200 years, and don't start reproducing until they're at least thirty. Rockfish represent a key part of kelp forest ecosystems and also have an important economic role in the fisheries industry.

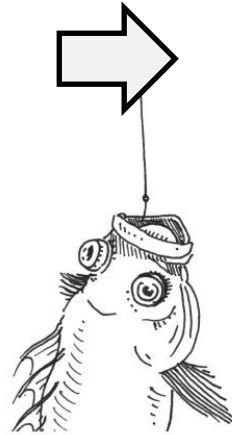
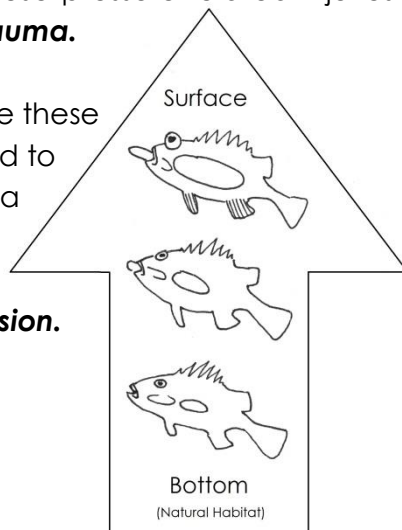
To return rockfish populations to healthy levels it is important to learn and practice sustainable and responsible fishing methods. Rockfish are especially prone to fishing-related injuries and extra care must be taken to ensure they are handled appropriately.

What is Barotrauma?

Rockfish (and most other fish) have organs called swim bladders. These air-filled structures allow fish to control their buoyancy in the water. If a fish is pulled up quickly the decrease in atmospheric pressure results in an increase in the volume of gas in the swim bladder. In extreme cases the inflated swim bladder pushes on the stomach, eventually pushing it out of the fish's mouth. The ascent can also cause their eyes to pop out. These pressure-related injuries are referred to as **barotrauma**.

Incredibly, fish can survive these injuries if they are returned to depth quickly. Returning a fish an environment with increased pressure is referred to as **recompression**.

Recovery and survival rates are best if the fish is recompressed *within two minutes!*



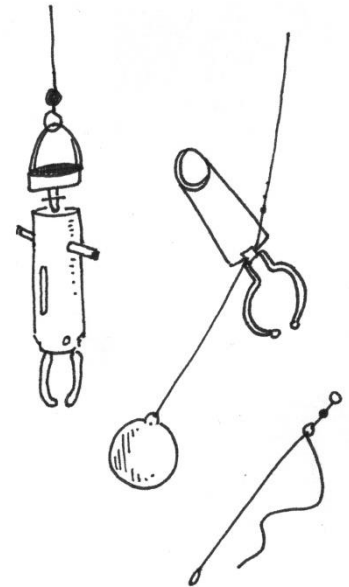
Why Bother?

- Recompressing a rockfish increases its chance of survival
- Increased survival means healthier rockfish populations
- Healthier populations mean that fishing can continue
- Leaving a fish to die on the surface ensures a slow and painful death.

What You Can Do

Send that fish down! **Fish descending devices** sink decompressed fish back down to a depth where the water pressure is higher and they can recover.

There are a number of fish descending devices that can be purchased online. The RokLees, the SeaQualizer, and the Shelton Fish Descender are all popular options. Or, make your own! Tie a weighted, up-side-down milk crate to a rope and lower the crate and fish down to at least 60 feet. After a minute you can pull the crate back up.



Descending devices