

Approach

In 2021 and again in 2024, thousands of recreational reef fish anglers across the Gulf of America were randomly selected to participate in a survey assessing awareness, perceptions, and intentions related to barotrauma and best release practices. These two surveys were used to understand changes over time within the fishing community.

Key Findings

Barotrauma Symptoms

Awareness of all barotrauma symptoms increased from 2021 to 2024.



Intestines protruding
+17%



Stomach protruding
+13%



Bubbling scales
+11%



Bloated Stomach
+6%

Best Release Practices

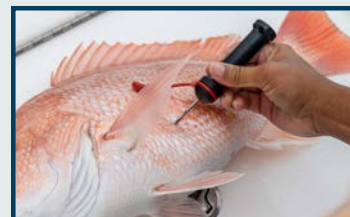
Awareness and self-reported use of venting and descending devices increased from 2021 to 2024.

Descending Devices



Awareness
+26%
Users
+21%

Venting Tools



Awareness
+9%
Users
+4%

Overall perceptions are more positive

- 11% more anglers agree that fish need help returning to depth, especially from deep water.
- Belief that anglers like themselves help fish return to depth increased by 16%.
- Anglers' confidence to return fish to depth rose from 56% to 71%.



Impact of RETURN 'EM RIGHT

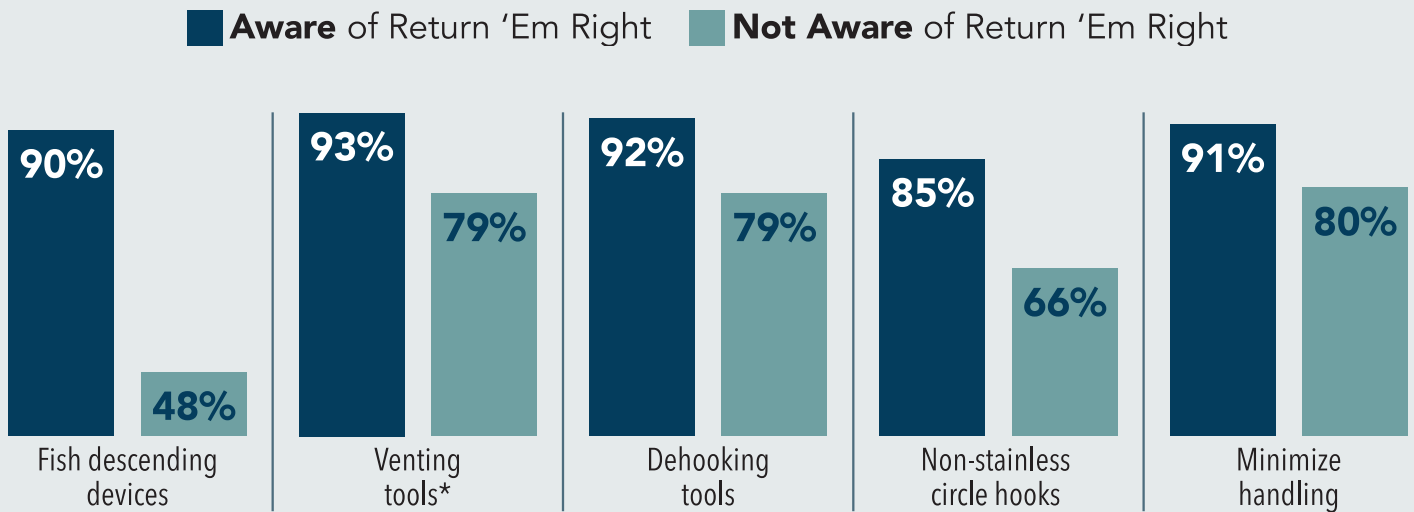
Background

Return 'Em Right launched in fall of 2021 to equip Gulf reef fish anglers with the education and gear to improve survival of released fish, particularly those experiencing barotrauma.

The percentage of anglers aware of **Return 'Em Right** increased from 4% in 2021 to 30% in 2024.

Awareness of Best Release Practices

Awareness of best release practices was higher among anglers familiar with the **Return 'Em Right** program compared to those who were not.



*Anglers aware of Return 'Em Right were 11% more likely to use a tool designed for venting

Confidence in Best Release Practices

Anglers aware of **Return 'Em Right** had higher confidence in their ability to return fish to depth and stronger beliefs in best release practices supporting fishery health.

