

**Background:**

- *FishSmart* is a program initiated by ASA to reduce the mortality of released fish (*not a program to promote catch and release as a practice*).
- “*Best Practices*” for handling and releasing fish, focusing on those caught in deep water were developed through workshops involving industry, anglers, scientists and managers (2010-2014).
- A framework was developed for a communication/education campaign to put this information into the hands of anglers.

**2017-2020 Project Summary:**

- *Purpose* was to distribute Best Practices with descending devices and gauge the effectiveness in the conservation of reef fish in the South Atlantic.
- 1,054 anglers in the South Atlantic were provided with videos & brochures on *Best Practices* and a descending device (SeaQualizer or Shelton Fish Descender). Descending devices improve the survival of saltwater fish caught and released in deep water when properly used.
- Partners included Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, North Carolina Department Environment & Natural Resources and The Nature Conservancy/Grays Reef National Marine Sanctuary.
- Additional programmatic and communication support was provided by Yamaha Motor Corporation, NOAA Fisheries, FishAmerica Foundation, American Sportfishing Association, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, SeaQualizer LLC, Shelton Fish Descenders and Shimano.

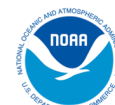
**Select Results:**

- **Exposure:** On average, anglers used the devices for an average 9 months, on 14 fishing trips.
- **Increased Awareness:** 66% had little or no knowledge of descender devices prior to participating in this project.
- **Effective Education:** 66% found *Best Practices* materials helpful to improving the way that they release fish or recognize the signs of barotrauma with 74% more likely to use a descender device to release fish when needed, 65% changing the way that they handled fish when releasing them, 67% using a descending for the first time, 17% changing the gear used to catch fish, and 21% changing how they brought fish to the boat or landed fish.
- **Changed Behavior:** 72% believe descender devices would be helpful/ very helpful to reduce discard mortality of Red Snapper.
- **Extended Communication:** 93% talked with, or involved other anglers in, the use of descending devices.

Results were very similar to an earlier effort focused in the Gulf of Mexico although there was slightly greater awareness of descending devices in the latest effort.



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