

PROPOSED RULES FOR ETHICAL FISHING, FOR MALAYSIAN FISHERMEN

By Aznir Malek

Note: Some of these rules were adapted from the fishing rules set by the International Game Fish Association (IGFA), a body representing anglers worldwide. The general objective is to promote ethical and sporting angling practices and to establish uniform regulations for competitions and the compilation of fishing records.

FISHING EQUIPMENT

A. LINES

Mainlines: Monofilament (nylon), multifilament (braided) may be used. Wire lines are prohibited

Line backing: Backing not attached to the mainline may be used, with no restriction as to size or material. If the backing is attached to the mainline, then the backing should not exceed 130 lb. (60 kg.). The catch shall be classed under the heavier line.

Double line: The use of a double line is not required. If one is used, then it must consist of the actual mainline. Maximum lengths for double lines are as follows

- Saltwater, up to 20 lb. (10 kg) line: 15 feet (4.57 m.)
- Saltwater, over 20 lb up to 130 lb.: 30 feet (9.14 m.)
- Freshwater, all sizes of line: 6 feet (1.82 m.)

Leader: The use of a leader is not required. If one is used, then it must meet the following specifications.

The leader must be connected to the line with a snap, knot, splice or other device. There are no regulations regarding the material or strength of the leader.

The maximum lengths for leaders are as follows:

- Saltwater, up to 20 lb (10 kg) line: 15 feet (4.57 m.). The combined length of double and leader should not exceed 20 feet (6.1 m.)
- Saltwater, over 20 lb and up to 130 lb (60 kg) line: 30 feet (9.14 m.). The combined length of leader and double should not exceed 40 feet (12.19 m)
- Freshwater, all line sizes: 6 feet (1.82 m.). The combined length of leader and double should not exceed 10 feet (3.04 m.)

B. HOOKS

For live or dead bait fishing: No more than two single hooks may be used. Both must be firmly embedded or attached to the bait. The use of a dangling or swinging hook is prohibited. Double or trebel hooks are prohibited.

A two hook rig for bottom fishing is only acceptable if it consists of single hooks on separate leaders or droppers. Both hooks must be embedded in the respective baits, and separated sufficiently so that a fish caught on one hook cannot be foul-hooked by the other.

Hooks for lures: When using an artificial lure with a skirt or trailing material, no more than two single hooks may be attached to the line, leader or trace. The trailing hook should not extend more than a hook's length beyond the skirt of the lure.

Treble or double hooks are permissible on lures

Use barbless hooks whenever possible. They are just as effective as barbed ones, and sometimes better. And they are much more humane to both fish and angler (YOU!)

C. REELS

Reels must comply with sporting ethics and customs

Power-driven reels of any kind are discouraged, and prohibited in all competitions or record applications. These include motor, hydraulic or electrically driven reels, and any other device that gives unfair advantage to the angler.

Ratchet handle reels are also discouraged, prohibited from competitions or record applications.

D. RODS

Rods must comply with sporting ethics and customs.

The rod tip (from the centre of the reel to the tip) must be a minimum of 40 inches (101.6 cm). The rod butt (from centre of reel to end of butt) cannot exceed 27 in. (68.58 cm).

The above measurements do not apply to surfcasting, coarse fishing and pole fishing rods.

FISHING ETIQUETTE

A. THE ANGLER'S FISHING ZONE

Respect other fishermen. They need their own space to fish. Do not encroach into their "fishing zone". Now this zone will vary according to the fishing situation, but the rule is to use common sense and a healthy amount of mutual respect.

B. COURTESY

- Be courteous to other fishermen. Get some agreement if you intend to fish near them.
- Do not make unnecessary noise
- Do not disturb the water unnecessarily, by wading, washing etc.
- If you are boating near other fishermen, slow down your boat, so as to minimise the disturbance.

C. SAFETY

- Always think Safety, for yourself and others
- Do not leave sharp objects lying around unattended
- Wear a personal floatation device (PFD) like lifejacket at all times when you are on the water
- Check for safety first, when you want to wade or use a boat. Seek advice regarding safety for the specific river, lake or sea, before you set out on your own. Remember; only cats have nine lives!

FISH CONSERVATION

Our fish stocks are now under pressure, from pollution, habitat degradation and over-fishing. We anglers need to reduce this pressure. Every good deed you do will help the cause.

A. ENDANGERED FISHES

Some of our fish species are now endangered or even close to extinction. Whenever you happen to catch one, please release it back with care. Some of these endangered species are listed below:

- Freshwater: Kelesa, temoleh, toman bunga (jaloi, jalai, kerandang), jengkua, kelah (except National Park rivers), wild jelawat, wild patin like patin muncung, kenderap, gerahak, sikang.
- Saltwater: All billfishes like ikan layar (sailfish) and mersuji (marlin), big sharks, kerapu bara (coral trout)

B. CATCH LIMITS

There are many of our species that, though they are not endangered, still need our help to sustain their stocks. You need to follow certain catch limits, to ensure this. These catch limits may vary from one water to another, but I suggest that, as a general guide, you follow the catch limits given below. You need to release the small fish, to give them a chance to grow, and also the big ones to give them a chance to propagate.

C. PROPOSED CATCH LIMITS BY SPECIES

No.	Fish Species (Freshwater)	Size limits (kg)		Bag Limits (per trip & per group)
		Minimum	Maximum	
1	Haruan	0.7	1.5	2
2	Bujuk	0.7	1.2	2
3	Toman Bunga	Release	Release	Release
4	Wild Jelawat	Release	Release	Release
5	Wild Patin	Release	Release	Release
6	Kalui	1.5	2.5	1
7	Temoleh	Release	Release	Release
8	Kelah	Release	Release	Release
9	Kelesa	Release	Release	Release
10	Tapah	10	15	1
11	Toman	1.5	3.0	1
12	Belida	2.0	3.0	1
13	Kerai	1.0	2.0	1
14	Lampam Sungai	-	-	5
15	Baung	0.6	1.5	1
16	Kelulang	0.6	1.5	2
17	Gerahak (Gahak)	Release	Release	Release
18	Jengkua	Release	Release	Release
19	Tengas (Kejor)	1.0	2.0	1
20	Sikang	Release	Release	Release
21	Sebarau	1.0	2.0	1
22	Tengelan	1.0	1.5	1

Note: If you happen to catch a fish you cannot identify, and are certain that it is not an alien fish, please release it. Better still, take a photo of it. For managed river such as Taman Negara (National Parks) or Babagon, please follow the managements' guidelines. However, we strongly recommend all catches to be released at these places.

D. CATCH AND RELEASE

- Try to land the fish as fast as you can
- Use a landing net, not a gaff. The net mesh should be of material that causes minimal damage to the fish (eg. knotless mesh).
- Wet your hands before handling the fish. This prevents the fish from losing too much of its protective slime covering.
- If possible, keep the fish in the water while you unhook it
- After unhooking, revive the fish: hold it by the tail in the water, move it forwards and backwards until its tail starts to kick, then let it go.
- If you wish to take photos, do it as quickly as possible. Do not hold the fish vertically (this may damage its organs and tissues). Support it with both hands, in a horizontal position.
- Unless you are fishing in a commercial pond, you should NOT release an alien fish.

E. FISH TAGGING PROGRAMS

Efforts have now been made to tag certain species, with the objectives of conservation and monitoring of their growth rates and behaviour patterns. Tagging of sailfish in both the South China Sea and Straits of Melaka has been initiated by Persatuan Memancing Malaysia (PeMM). The kelah of Sungai Tahan are also being tagged by the Kelah Sanctuary organisation. I am sure that more tagging programs will commence in the future.

The tag is usually a plastic dart that is attached to the dorsal area of the fish. If you happen to catch a tagged fish, please follow the procedure below:

- Do not pull out the tag, unless the fish has died.
- Note down the code number, and any other particulars printed on the tag.
- Record the following: weight of the fish, its standard length (from nose to base of tail), its total length (from nose to end of tail), the girth (the biggest circumference around the belly, exact location of the catch, water conditions, date, time, weather conditions, bait/lure used.
- Release the fish if possible
- Contact the relevant organisation and feedback the above information.

F. THE THREAT FROM ALIEN FISHES

The last few years has seen more and more alien species appearing in our natural waters, mainly via the aquarium and aquaculture industries. There is insufficient research done on the negative effects of these species on our local fishes, but observations by many fishermen show that the threat is real. Some alien fishes breed very fast, forage on the eggs and fry of local fish, or even destroy the habitat.

The end result will be stunted fishes, or reduced fish stocks.

We can't afford to wait for scientific research on this issue. We need to take action now. If you catch any of these alien species in a natural water (river, lake, naturalised lombong etc), DO NOT RELEASE them back into the water. Cull them and donate them to a good cause.

Some of these aliens include:

- The Cichlids: Flower horns, peacock bass, jaguar cichlids, 'kerapu lombong', Tilapia (all types)
- The Carps: Grass carp, leekoh, bighead carp, silver carp, rohu
- The Catfishes: African keli and Russian catfish
- Other alien species: Pacu, lampam jawa, sucker mouth ('bandaraya' fish)

Note: even a local species may be considered an 'alien' for a particular water, when its introduction creates harm. An example is toman when introduced into a new water (eg. Klang Gates Dam, Batu Dam), may propagate so fast as to dominate the whole water. Selective culling may be needed here

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

A. CLEANLINESS

- Take back everything that you brought for your fishing. Leave nothing behind. After all, the stuff you bring back is usually lighter than what you brought!
- Bring large dustbin bags: you can also collect other people's rubbish. Be a role model, and others will follow.
- Be extra careful with discarded fishing lines, plastic bags and small leads. These things kill birds, fish and other animals. Cut your discarded fishing lines into short lengths, then dispose into the rubbish bags.
- Tin cans and plastic bags make perfect homes for mosquitoes. Bring them home!

B. MAINTAINING WATER QUALITY

- Do not dirty the water
- If there are no toilets in the vicinity, do not urinate or defecate in or near the water. Do your toilet duties away from the water. Make a hole in the ground, and cover it back when you are finished.
- In stillwaters, do not excessively groundbait (berley) your swim. Too much groundbaiting deteriorates the water quality.
- Do not release chemical liquids (eg. detergents, oils, even carbonated drinks) into the water or by the banks where they can leach back into the water.
- Do not use insecticides (eg insect sprays) and animal deterrents (eg. sulphur powder) excessively. Some of these harmful chemicals may end up in the water.

C. CARE FOR THE SURROUNDINGS AND VEGETATION

- Try not to cut down any vegetation on or near the water. This vegetation is home to insects, a major food source for the fish.
- If you intend to camp, use specified or ready-made campsites. Try not to clear new ground. Exposed earth end up as silt in the river after heavy rains, destroying fish habitat and affecting fish breeding.
- Do not make open fires unless it is really necessary. A stove is always more eco-friendly. If you do make an open fire, make sure it will not spread to nearby vegetation. Always douse the fire completely before you leave.
- At campsites or along jungle trails, never leave cut saplings protruding from the ground. They act like spears when you fall on them! Cut them at the base, if you have to, leaving no sharp points.
- Leave nothing but footprints, and shoot only with cameras!