

# Sawfish Handling and Release Guidelines

*Keep as much of the sawfish in the water as possible.*

*Use extreme caution when handling and releasing sawfish as the saw can thrash violently from side to side*

## For sawfish caught on longline gear:

- ◆ Use line cutting poles, boltcutters, long-handled dehookers and boat hooks to aid in removing gear, including hooks, from the sawfish
- ◆ If the sawfish is hooked and not entangled, cut the line as close to the hook as possible. Remove the hook with a dehooker, if possible
- ◆ If the sawfish is hooked and line is tangled around the saw (rostrum), remove all line with a boat hook or line cutting pole, then cut the line as close to the hook as possible. Remove the hook with a dehooker, if possible
- ◆ If hooked internally, do NOT attempt to remove the hook, use line cutting pole or boat hook to remove as much line as possible

## For sawfish caught in trawl or gill net gear:

- ◆ **DO NOT REMOVE THE FISH'S SAW (ROSTRUM)**
- ◆ Leave the sawfish, especially the gills, in the water as much as possible
- ◆ Use line cutting pole or knife to cut any net tangled around the saw by cutting the mesh along the length of the saw
- ◆ Once mesh is cut, work it free with a boat hook or line cutting pole

## In your logbook, document as much information as possible including:

- ◆ Date and time of encounter
- ◆ Location (GPS coordinates)
- ◆ Habitat (water depth, bottom type)
- ◆ Estimated total length of sawfish including saw
- ◆ Description of gear that could not safely be removed from the animal
- ◆ Markings, scars, wounds
- ◆ If present, record tag number and type (shape and color) (tags are found on or below the dorsal fins), but do not remove the tag
- ◆ Details of capture (bait, hook size/type, mesh size, length of gear)
- ◆ Sex of sawfish, if known (male sawfish, like sharks, have two claspers at the base of the pelvic fins)

*Do not remove the saw or injure the sawfish in any way.*

*With a little extra effort, and the proper use of required tools, endangered smalltooth sawfish can be returned to the water with little or no damage.*

**Smalltooth sawfish are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act and "take" of listed species is prohibited under section 9 of the Endangered Species Act. Any sawfish caught while fishing must be released as quickly as possible. More information can be found at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/fish/smalltoothsawfish.htm>**

