



Competition Rules and Best Practice Guidelines



Vic Bream Classics - Competition Rules and Best Practice Guidelines

December 2013

Introduction

The Vic Bream Classic (VBC) is a premier, catch and release tournament targeting the black bream, *Acanthopagrus butcheri* with strict rules that competitors must follow if competing. These rules now also incorporate Best Practice fishing guidelines, many of which have been included as rules. The Best Practice fishing guidelines have been specifically developed to provide competitors with information to help maximise the survival of fish caught and released as part of the competition.

It is important to note that competitors taking part in VBC competitions and holding a Victorian recreational fishing license can legally capture and kill up to 10 black bream of legal size per day. However, VBC competitors choose not to do this, preferring instead to release live all bream that they catch as part of the competition and do so in a way that maximises survival of those bream. The maximum number of bream that they can have weighed in and then release at the end of each day of a competition is five.

Best Practice fishing guidelines are fish species and competition specific. Many of the Best Practice guidelines in this document have relevance to catch and release competitions targeting other fish species; however, as these guidelines have utilised scientific understanding and angler's experience specifically with black bream, so too should guidelines developed for other competitions utilise specific knowledge about the fish species being targeted.

Adherence to these rules and guidelines will ensure anglers are engaging in practices which aim to minimise stress and maximise survivability of bream that are captured and then released as part of the competition, given the current understanding of this species.

General competition rules

1. BREAM boats must be 3.7m in length or greater. Horsepower and beam must be sufficient to plane the craft with two anglers and full live well/s. 15hp is considered the minimum to achieve this. All engines must be fitted with a man-overboard or dead man's kill switch and safety lanyard. If in doubt, check with VBC staff or your nearest outboard dealer.
2. Boat drivers must wear their engine's safety lanyard strap that connects to the kill switch at all times while the engine is running. Additionally, all competitors are required to wear personal flotation devices while their boat is planing.
3. All anglers must wear a PFD type 1 at all times if their boat is less than 4.8m
4. All boat owners must ensure that Vic Bream Classic have a current copy of their boat insurance policy before any scheduled event. This can be sent in with entry forms.



-
5. There is no age limit to for anglers competing in the Vic Bream Classic Series however people under the age of 16 are required to fish with a parent or guardian.

Starts

6. On the Friday night briefing, boats will be allocated a starting position for Day 1 that is determined by the receipt of a fully completed and paid entry. Each day will start with a rolling start where boats file past the start area or start boat, receive a tournament key-tag, have their live well checked, safety gear checked and safety lanyard checked before being released to fish.

Day 1

7. The first day will start with boat one approaching the start area, where it will be held until the designated start time. When released, boat two can approach the start area, be checked and released, and so on until all competitors are released to fish.

Day 2

8. Day 2 start will be run as a chase start. That is the boater placed in first position after Day 1 will be released first, then the second placed boat and so on until all boats are released. Any speed restrictions, non-boating or nonfishing areas must be adhered to, unless advised otherwise at the briefing. VBC reserves the right to disallow unsafe boats (for either anglers or fish) to compete.

Etiquette

9. During fishing sessions, no mobile phones or radios should be used, except in an emergency.
10. Non-boaters should bring their own PFD to tournaments.
11. Boats should remain a cast apart (30metres) while fishing

Fishing Rules and Best Practice Guidelines

Please note that **numbered** instructions are considered as competition rules and **must** be followed. Instructions presented in **highlighted boxes** are considered best practice and **should** be followed where possible.

1. Anglers must be in possession of the necessary permits or licences as demanded by the waterway in the state being fished. Anglers should bring these with them to the tournament briefings. VBC will make you go and buy one before letting you fish.
2. Anglers may fish any line class with spin, baitcast, spincast or flyfishing tackle.
3. Lure and fly CASTING only is permitted. Trolling is not permitted. Trolling is defined as using the momentum of the boat to give the lure action. Casting along a stretch of bank under electric power is fine, as is using your electric motor to keep position; don't, however, leave your lines in the water when changing positions. VBC Staff reserve the right to disqualify anglers deemed to be purposely trolling in defiance of the spirit of BREAM events.
4. If weather conditions on the day of a competition are forecast to be either very hot or very cold, VBC staff reserve the right to change the start and end time for that day. For example, if the forecast is for very hot conditions, the start time may be put forward by one hour and the finish time may be midday instead of 2PM to avoid the hottest period of the day.

-
5. Fish must be caught during the designated times and kept in the Boaters' livewells. No more than five bream per angler are allowed to be kept at any one time. If you already have five fish and catch another, immediately release a fish. Anglers caught fishing with more than the competition BREAM bag limit will be immediately disqualified and VBC staff reserve the right to check boats' livewells for excess bream during competition hours.
 6. Anglers must only use one rod at a time while fishing all BREAM events, including such cases as when a lure is snagged but still attached to the rod, anglers can not pick up another rod and begin casting as this would constitute using two rods. Hooks must be set as quickly as possible to minimise the chance of deep hooking. Lines must always be attended.
 7. Fishing is NOT permitted within any defined non-boating or non-fishing areas. Also, if asked to leave a private marina or oyster lease, you must do so.
 8. All pairs of anglers are to stay with each other at all times, to ensure safety and to validate co-anglers' catches. Additionally, anglers are not permitted to fish from outside their fishing vessels at any time during sessions, including fighting and landing fish.
 9. In the case of physical or medical emergencies, VBC officials will judge the acceptability of catches.

Hooking and handling

10. Hooked fish must be brought to the boat without delay. Studies with other fish species have shown that a proportion of fish that are played until exhausted will not recover. The closer a fish is to exhaustion, the longer it will take to recover.
11. **AVOID AIR EXPOSURE.** All steps must be taken to minimise the time fish are out of water ("air exposure"). Fish cannot absorb oxygen across the gills when they are out of the water. Likewise, carbon dioxide and ammonia cannot be excreted. Remove the hook(s) as quickly as possible with as little damage as possible, measure the fish and either release it or put it into the live well immediately. DO NOT hold them out of the water while waiting to take a photo – keep them in the water until ready.
12. Anglers must ensure that everything that touches a fish (and that the fish touches) is wet. Fish must not be put down on the deck of the boat without something wet underneath them. This is to minimise any damage to the delicate skin (which sits OVER the scales) and outer mucus (slime) layer of the fish.
13. All nets used to capture fish must be of the knotless variety. Rubber type nets are acceptable.

Care should be taken when fishing at depths greater than 10m as there is the potential for barotrauma in general when fish are caught from depth. Further studies are required on bream to determine how likely they are to experience barotrauma and the impact it may have on this species.

Live wells

14. All boats must have a minimum 60 litre live well – larger sizes are encouraged.

The first fish of the day that is retained should be placed into a live well that is full of water. Hence pumps to fill live wells should be turned on as soon as the boat stops at the first fishing spot.



15. Anglers must be aware of the four key factors to providing healthy conditions in a live well. They must ensure that:

- i. There is no possibility of fish injuring themselves on equipment or sharp objects in the live well;
- ii. There is adequate dissolved oxygen (DO) at all times while fish are in the well;

A minimum DO of 85% saturation and an upper level of 105% saturation is recommended.

- iii. The water temperature in the live well is kept similar to the water temperature at the depth the fish was caught;
- iv. Metabolic wastes released by the fish, including ammonia and carbon dioxide, are not allowed to build up to toxic levels in the live well.

In addition, fish should have sufficient room to be able to turn and so choose how they orientate themselves in the live well.

16. Fish in live wells must not be exposed to direct sunlight except briefly during periods when fish are being added or removed from the live well.

Where possible live well tanks should be located in the rear of the boat. In rough weather, forward live wells are more subject to sloshing and movement compared to live wells located in the rear.

Ideally, boats should have a two pump system – one as an intake pump to fill the tank and add new water and one pump that functions as a recirculation pump, the plumbing ensuring that recirculated water is also aerated to both get oxygen dissolving in the water and to assist with degassing of carbon dioxide. Boats should have sufficient battery capacity to ensure pumps can be operated at all times during the competition.

17. If there are fish in the live well and there is an electrical failure which stops pumps working, anglers must ensure that water quality in the live well is maintained as stipulated in rule #15. This is helped by anglers ensuring they have a back up aerator with a separate power source (e.g. battery operated air stone) which can be immediately placed into the live well in the event of an electrical failure.

If there is any concern that water quality cannot be maintained, then anglers must either immediately release the fish or return to the weigh in area by the shortest route while continually observing the fish. If there is any indication that the fish are being impacted by a decrease in water quality during passage, they must be released.

18. Live wells that are totally enclosed must either have a degassing system in place to ensure the air in the enclosed space is regularly flushed OR anglers must regularly open the lid to ensure flushing of air during periods when there are fish in the live well. This is to ensure that the concentration of carbon dioxide, expired by the fish, is not allowed to build up in the air and hence slow down the degassing of carbon dioxide from the water.

All anglers should use a knotless or rubber net to re-capture fish from a live well. The suitability of marker systems, where a float is clipped to a fish to identify it in the live well, has not been evaluated for black bream. Until such evaluation, the use of marker systems is discouraged.

Anglers should avoid pumping water into the live well during periods when the quality of the surface water appears reduced (e.g. high amount of organic material, high water temperature at surface compared to at depths >1m, obvious algal bloom). During such times, intake pumps must be turned off and anglers should move to an area with better quality surface water.

19. At no time can any chemical be added to the water in the live well and fish must not be fed while in the live well.

The water intake for live well should stay submerged at all times.

At weigh in

20. The life support and display tanks must ALWAYS be kept in the shade until the point at which the last fish is released.
21. The temperature in the life support and display tanks must be monitored, particularly on warm/hot days. If the water temperature is noted to be rising, increased exchange of cooler water must be instigated to minimise any increase in water temperature in these tanks.
22. All fish must be weighed in live and then MUST BE RELEASED after the weigh in, either into a VBC display tank or the water way where it was caught. Any fish that DOES NOT SWIM AWAY when released after being weighed in will be re-weighed separately and then that weight will be deducted from that team's original weight.
23. Fish being released must be released gently, in an area where there is sufficient depth for the fish not to touch the bottom when released.

The area where fish are being released should be protected from predators and the water temperature at the release point should be checked to ensure it is not significantly warmer than elsewhere in the lake/water system.

24. Air exposure must be minimised at all times. Studies have shown that air exposure is one of the major factors impacting survivability of fish being released at tournaments.

Fish should be transported from boats to the weigh in area in a bag which has the bottom half made of impermeable smooth material. This allows the fish to stay in water as they are carried from the boat to the weigh in station and the life support tank. It is acceptable to have one or two small drainage holes at the bottom that allow slow drainage of the water held in the bag.

The weigh in area should be located in a position so that the time an angler takes to carry the fish taken from the live well to the life support tank is no more than 30 seconds.

Taking photographs is an important part of the competition. The amount of air exposure a fish is exposed to while taking photographs should be minimised. This can be achieved by ensuring that there is a competition staff member dedicated solely to the taking of photographs who ensures everything is ready BEFORE fish are taken out of the display tank. Holding the fish in the water in the carry bag until just before the photo is taken will also assist in minimising air exposure.

Biosecurity

25. At the end of each competition, anglers must wash their boat's live well and then thoroughly rinse out the live well with fresh, potable water and allow to dry BEFORE traveling to the next fishing destination. This is to prevent the build up of organics in the live well between fishing activities and also minimise the risk of transfer of any possible bugs or pathogens between fishing locations.

Acknowledgements

This project was funded by the Victorian Government using Recreational Fishing Licence fees and the Recreational Fishing Initiative.

The Best Practice Guidelines were drafted by Panaquatic Health Solutions Pty Ltd in consultation with the competition organisers.

The 2002 document "Keeping Bass Alive – A guidebook for Anglers and Tournament Organisers (Gilliland, G, Schramm, H and B Shupp) and the updated 2009 version¹ is acknowledged in the development of these guidelines. While specifically written for bass fishing, it contains a lot of useful information which is relevant to bream fishing. Some of the information has been included in these guidelines.



¹ Available at http://www.ncwildlife.org/portals/0/boating/documents/keeping_bass_alive_handbook.pdf