

# Seal friendly fishing tips

## Top tips to get the most out of angling on the coast or offshore, whilst protecting the UK's internationally important seal populations!



Seals are curious marine creatures and interact intelligently with people. You will find they are interested in seeing what you are up to! This makes them susceptible to developing humanised behaviour to the detriment of their long term survival. You can help keep seals wild by resisting the temptation to give them your catch or bait. Feeding wild seals creates huge problems for people and seals, as seals soon learn to associate boats with a quick and easy meal, leading to more seals in and around harbours and to increased conflict with the commercial fishing industry. Seals may unashamedly beg for food! Be strong and don't give in to them.

Got left over bait? Take it home and freeze it or share it with other anglers. Throwing left over bait into the sea can encourage seals to become familiar with and frequent good angling sites, which is counterproductive for anglers. Release any catch quietly, to avoid attracting the attention of any seals in the vicinity.

If seals are seen in the sea or hauled out close to a fishing spot, there is a risk that they could be hooked or damage your gear and catch. It is probably best to find another fishing spot, as you are unlikely to have a great day's fishing near to them! Alternatively wait until the seals have lost interest in you and moved off.

Never cast towards a seal and avoid casting if seals show an interest in you or your bait. Hooking a seal can be highly dangerous for you and can easily result in the loss of your gear or worse. Situations can change in a split second. Seals are very powerful creatures that can swim off at high speed. Equally they have strong jaws with large sets of interlocking teeth that you don't want to get close to!

Over 60 live seals in Cornwall have been observed with net entanglement injuries, some of these as a result of angling line. Please check your gear and tackle regularly, to avoid breaks resulting in the loss of your line into the sea. Any suspect or broken line can be disposed of in monofilament recycling bins around harbours. If you don't have access to a line recycling bin, please cut your line into short pieces and put into a bin with a lid. Seals have been observed with multiple mackerel feathers hooked into their face and bodies. Whilst painful and causing unpleasant injuries, the hooks rarely prove fatal, however attached line can snag underwater, increasing injuries and at worst can lead to death by drowning if the seal is unable to escape before running out of oxygen.



6 month old seal caught in line

Stainless steel hooks have the advantage of being long lasting, but for a seal this is a major disadvantage, once snagged, the hooks don't rot away! Please use corrodible hooks.

Aim to keep your distance from any seals that are hauled out (approaching them head on makes you look like a predator!) Always observe a seal's reactions to your presence. Repeatedly looking at you in an alert way and moving nearer the water's edge, are signs that you are already close enough, so back away slightly, remain still and avoid eye contact, as this may be perceived as a threat. Leave the seal with an obvious escape route back to the sea. Remembering that you are unlikely to be the only person the seals have seen that day. Repeated disturbance off haul out rocks creates a double energy whammy for seals. They haul out to digest their food, so being prematurely disturbed into the sea reduces the amount of energy they can get from their food, whilst using more energy to rush into the sea and haul back out again. This is likely to upset their energy balance and long term healthy status.

Take your rubbish home with you and dispose of it responsibly. Seals have been observed to eat plastic bags and crisp packets. A week old seal pup had to battle in Spring tides with high swells, as well as being bashed by numerous plastic bottles, an oil drum and a plank of wood. Their young lives are tough enough with mortality rates of 30 to 50%, without having our marine litter pose extra threats.

Finally, other people like to know what marine life is about, so please report any sightings of seals to Cornwall Seal Group by emailing [sue@cornwallsealgroup.co.uk](mailto:sue@cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) giving the date, location and number of seals seen and any other relevant information and Cornwall Wildlife Trust by visiting their website [http://www.ercis.co.uk/wildlife\\_recording/](http://www.ercis.co.uk/wildlife_recording/)

**Many thanks for being a seal friendly angler.**

[www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk](http://www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk)