

It's better on top

(part four)



Single hooks and flattened barbs help avoid injury to the fish (and people) and aid unhooking for successful releases.

This month I will explain how I rig lures for my customer's here at Nomad Sportfishing NZ.

I'll also share my thoughts and theories on: how different hooks affect the action of lures; how I rig lures when the fishing is hot or slow; and add to the debate regarding the use of single versus treble hooks.

Rigging lures for casting

When it comes to lures, I am fortunate to have my own brand

of Nomad lures, which have benefited from a long period of research and development. That's why I also know the rigging methods that maximise the various lures' swimming actions and which help to ensure a big fish is hooked nicely in the corner of its mouth.

The standard go-to setup I use is better known as the 'Baker rig'. This includes a big single hook on the lure's rear – in my case I use the Owner Jobu hook. For smaller lures

– say 80-100g – I use the 8/0 size, while for lures over 100 grams I use a 9/0 Jobu. I like the Jobu because they: are a game hook (so are super-strong); have a welded eye; and have a flat spot on the eye, which makes rolling them into the lure split-rings relatively easy.

Now for the hooks on the belly. I use two jigging-type hooks here – in my case Owner SJ-41s; these are a very strong hook, so I know I can rely on them. They are placed on a

split-ring with the shanks back to back, opposed to one another. They also have a welded eye and a flat spot that make them easy to roll into a split-ring. To finish off, I simply wrap a cable-tie around the two shanks to keep them in place. (Every now and then the cable tie will break, so have plenty of spares handy.)

So what split-rings should be used? I particularly like the Owner size #11 for attaching all my hooks to lures. The #11 is rated to 250 pounds, and to date I have yet to see one open up. I do not use the #11H – not only is it harder to get the hooks onto these split-rings, but they don't always close properly either, so when the leader gets tangled up in the belly hooks, the leader can end up pinched in the split-ring, weakening the leader. So when that next big kingie smashes the lure, it can end in tears, with the fish having a lure in its face till it falls out – which brings me to my next point: barbs.

As a professional charter operator, I feel we should lead by example, so



Reliable hooks and split-rings are a comfort when the pressure is on.

crush all hook barbs before the lure is cast. This makes it far better for the fish when removing the hooks and releasing it to fight another day – especially if the lure has been inhaled and both sets of hooks are in its throat. This is also handy when a fish gets nailed by the second set of hooks as well, or the hooks become embedded in an angler (or myself) while dealing with a fish at the boat or due to a casting mishap. In all cases they will cause less damage and are much less painful to remove.

The only downside to running barbless hooks is that pressure must be applied on the rod at all times during the battle or the hook may fall out and the fish will swim free. Some people might not like the thought of this, but with the technology in rods, reels, braids and lures continuing to improve in effectiveness all the time, this evens up the odds a bit and encourages us to employ better sport-fishing techniques throughout each fight.

The Baker Rig gives the lure a wicked action and means plenty of hook is exposed (ensuring there is a very good hook-up rate), but when the fishing gets hot I tend to replace the two opposed hooks from the belly with a single inline hook. My hook of choice in this instance is the Decoy Sergeant jigging hook in 7/0 size – again, a very strong hook that

has never let me down. When rigging our Nomad lures, I choose not to use treble hooks at all, as these dampen the swimming action of the lure, making them appear very 'lazy'. In saying this though, be aware there are many lures out there that swim *better* with a treble attached to the belly, as this helps stop the lure from popping out the water and tumbling. It pays to experiment.

Singles vs. trebles

This topic always comes up in discussions when talking about rigging lures. I am obviously on side of singles, as not only are our lures better suited to them, but the extra damage trebles inflict on hooked fish is hard to justify. For example, a fish hooked on a treble will, more often than not, get all three hooks in its mouth, making it difficult to remove, and if the lure's second set becomes embedded in the fish's belly or eye, they can make a nasty mess.

In contrast, singles often hook the fish in the corner of the mouth, greatly improving the survival chances of the fish following release. This is important, because although I do take fish for the table, I am also very proactive about catch, photo and release – and this seems to be catching on. Consequently, I am currently working with Sam from Real Appeal lures to develop his lures so they have the best possible swimming action when rigged



Single hooks give more regular jaw hook-ups than trebles. Note the use of a two split-ring chain to correct the hook orientation.

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Surface lure rigs as preferred by the writer; at bottom is the 'Baker Rig'.

with singles. Another big influence is Nomad Sportfishing Charters in Australia. These guys have banned trebles on all their lures, because their hook-up rates are better with singles and are less damaging to the fish, all of which are released.

When it comes to joining a lure to the leader, there are a few options. With poppers I use an NT size #1 swivel tied to the leader with a Uni knot and an Owner size #11 splitting to the popper. This system can be used with stick-baits as well. This makes lure changing throughout the day much easier. Where possible, I prefer to tie the lure direct to the leader though, as this improves the lure's swimming action. I use a Uni knot for this as well.

Whatever you use, be sure to check your knots before letting rip, as sometimes the friction generated when pulling the Uni knot up can damage the leader. It always pays to put a bit of saliva on the knot before slowly pulling it up tight and

Ben Pokaia operates Nomad Charters, based out of Tauranga in the Bay of Plenty.

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