

## **Increase Rockfish Counts With Precision Drops**

By: Capt. David Bacon

Catching fish is often all about timing. Follow this advice from a sportfishing captain, and you will catch fish like a pro rather than looking like a novice with an empty sack.

Here is a common scenario... the skipper has his or her eyes glued to the fishfinder while exploring a potentially productive area. Suddenly the skipper slows and turns the boat, hollers for everyone bait up and be ready, then does some fancy maneuvering, and finally yells, "Okay, drop 'em"!

This is a fleeting opportunity and you gotta be quick! The boat is over a stack of happy looking fish, but will soon drift off. The skipper has set up the drift so that baits will drop right down to those hungry fish below. Now it's up to the anglers to get their baits down there quickly. Wait ten seconds before dropping – because you failed to be truly prepared - and you'll likely miss the fish.

Few things sadden a conscientious skipper more - after working hard to create the perfect drift and giving the command to drop - than turning to find anglers still baiting up, or unwrapping their lines from the ends of their rods, or pulling out birdnest tangles from their reels. The skipper did his/her job. The anglers must do theirs, or the lack of fish in the box is their fault.

Here's the way to be prepared and get those fish... The first order of business is to prepare your terminal rigging before the moment when haste is crucial. When fishing this type of structure, it is common to use dropper loops, double dropper loops and reverse dropper loops. Tie them up or ask a deckhand or more experienced fisherfolk how to tie these up. There are some good cards, or booklets on knot tying available at most tackle shops, and they are very handy resources to have in your tackle box or pocket.

This is a perfect application for a double dropper loop rig. To make one up I slide two large hooks on the line and then tie on a fairly heavy (5 to 8oz, or heavier, depending upon the speed of the drift) torpedo sinker. Then I twist two dropper loops, one for each hook, spaced about two feet apart. A live bait is a wise choice for the bottom hook, or a crawdad, crab, or bloodworm. Squid strips are great for the top hook since most any of these fish down here will readily bite squid.

A common variation on this rig is to use a jig or leadhead/plastic tail combo in place of the torpedo sinker and then go with one dropper loop above the lure, in order to stay within the maximum allowable hook count (which is two when fishing for rockfish or when rockfish are aboard). The weight, jig, or leadhead must be heavy enough to drop quickly down to the bottom. If the weight is too light the baits will not drop into the stack of fish.

This is important... pay close attention to what the boat is doing. When the skipper begins maneuvering, bait up your hooks. Never wait until after the skipper gives the command to drop. Hold your weight in one hand and your rod in the other, thereby minimizing the dangers of flailing weights and hooks. When the skipper says to drop them, you want to be already at the rail and ready. Not only should you begin to drop the baits down as soon as the skipper says to, but you should be sure to allow it to drop as quickly as possible.

Even after all preparations, if the bait is lowered too slowly, the stack of fish will be missed. Drop the baits fast, with your thumb just barely feathering the spool so that it can pay out line at top speed, yet will stop when the weight hits the bottom. Now click the reel into gear and quickly get that weight up about one foot from the bottom so it doesn't hang up in the rocks. You are now probably about two seconds away from getting bit, because you have done everything right and your baits are surrounded by hungry fish. Once you feel a bite, set the hook and begin reeling simultaneously so that the fish never gets an inch of slack. Slack line loses fish! Keep that line taught at all times!

When fisherfolk are taking an active role in the fish catching process, the results are surprisingly good. It really adds to the fun of the fishing experience when everyone aboard puts their minds into the sport and tries to do the right thing at the right time. I call this precision fishing, and during my charters, I commend my passengers when they are focused and taking advantage of all the opportunities I carefully create for them. Everyone aboard tends to smile a lot when the fish are coming aboard, but there is no more genuine happy smile than the one on the skipper's face!