



Spiny Lobster Fact Sheet

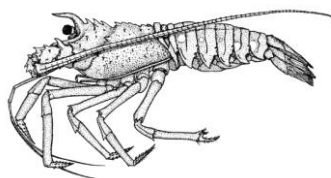


Image courtesy of NOAA

Basic Biology

Latin name: *Panulirus argus*

Range: Tropical and sub-tropical waters of the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea

Habitat: Coral reefs

Diet: Molluscs, crustaceans, worms and dead animal matter

Age and growth: Grow to a maximum of 9-10 inches carapace length (15-20 lbs) and live more than 20 years

Sustainability

- The most recent stock assessment (2005) indicated that U.S. spiny lobsters are sustainable. Because U.S. spiny lobsters are part of a Caribbean wide population, a Caribbean wide stock assessment must be conducted to determine whether the overall population is overfished.
- The commercial fisheries are open from August 6 through March 30. The closed season protects lobsters during the peak of spawning. Regulations prohibit the harvest of egg-bearing females at all times.
- The minimum size limit of 3-inch carapace length allows lobsters to spawn before harvest.
- Traps, the most common method of harvest, have a minimal effect on the surrounding environment and bycatch is generally low and released alive.
- A trap reduction program implemented in 1993 to reduce overcapacity in the commercial fishery successfully increased female lobster abundance.
- There are a number of marine protected areas (MPAs) in southern Florida where the harvest of spiny lobster is prohibited at all times.

Info for Chefs

- The U.S. spiny lobster fishery is located in south Florida, primarily in the Florida Keys.
- Commercial landings vary between four and eight million pounds per fishing season and approximately 40% of the season's commercial catch is harvested in August.
- Illegal importation of undersized lobsters does occur. In 2006 a Miami-based seafood company was convicted of importing over 40 shipments (over 16,500 pounds) of undersized frozen lobster tails from Jamaica.
- A legal-sized lobster in the U.S. has a tail weighing just over 4 oz. Though some countries allow harvest below this size these lobsters were most likely not reproductively mature before they were harvested. **Chefs should avoid buying tails less than 4 oz. in weight.**

Info for Servers

- The population present in U.S. waters is part of a larger Caribbean-wide stock is impacted by the fisheries in other nations. Newly hatched lobster drift on ocean currents for nine months before settling to the bottom and developing into a juvenile lobster, thus lobsters in our waters were likely spawned in other countries.

Sources: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Sea Stats Spiny Lobster publication, December 2004
NOAA Fisheries Office for Law Enforcement press release, May 30, 2006