What You Need to Know to "Stay Legal"

Basic Sport Fishing Regulations for Spiny Lobster

A legal-sized lobster carapace is as large or larger than the fixed gap of the measuring gauge.

- A **California sport fishing license** with ocean enhancement stamp is required to take lobster south of Point Arguello. The license must be displayed by hoop netters, and divers must keep their fishing license either aboard the vessel or, if beach diving, with their gear within 500 yards from shore.
- A **Spiny Lobster Report Card** is required for every person fishing for or taking spiny lobster. This includes persons who are not required to have a sport fishing license, such as children under the age of 16, persons fishing from a public pier, and persons fishing on free fishing days. Report cards must be carried by hoop netters, and divers must keep it with their fishing license. Just like the sport fishing license, report cards are valid from January 1 through December 31. If a lobster fisherman fills up a card before the year ends, the card can be returned and a new one purchased. The Spiny Lobster Report Card must be returned to the Department no later than January 31 of the following year.
- The **spiny lobster open season** runs from the Saturday preceding the first Wednesday in October through the first Wednesday after March 15 (the first Wednesday in October is when commercial season opens).
- No **implements** other than hoop nets may be used to take lobster. Divers may only use their bare or gloved hands to take lobster.
- Both lobster divers and hoop netters must carry a **lobster gauge** when attempting to take lobster. The gauge is a metal or plastic measuring device that has a fixed gap of 3¼ inches for determining the legal size of the lobster. Lobster gauges can be purchased at most dive and tackle shops. Divers may bring lobster to the surface of the water for the purpose of measuring, but no undersized lobster may be retained by the diver, brought aboard any boat, or placed in any type of receiver. Hoop netters are required to measure lobster immediately upon retrieving their net, and any undersized lobster must be released immediately.
- The **lobster daily bag and possession limit is seven (7) lobsters.** This includes any lobster stored at home or elsewhere; at no time may more than seven lobsters be in anyone's possession.
- A maximum of **five (5) hoop nets** may be fished by an individual, except on piers, jetties, and other shore-based structures where each angler is limited to **two (2) hoop nets**. No more than **10 hoop nets** may be fished on a vessel, regardless of how many licensed anglers are aboard.
- It is illegal to disturb or rob commercial lobster traps.

Why all the regulations?

The Department of Fish and Game's mission is to manage all of California's wildlife and the habitats they depend on, so that residents and visitors to the State can enjoy and use these resources for years to come. The minimum size limit allows each lobster to reproduce at least once before it is captured. The closed season protects lobster that are carrying eggs or molting. Gear restrictions help to prevent injury or death before the animal can be legally harvested. The bag limit prevents too many lobster from being harvested. The Spiny Lobster Report Card allows Department biologists to find out how many people are fishing for lobster, how long it takes to catch them, how many are being harvested, the type of gear being used, and where the animals are being caught. With this information, biologists can determine whether the lobster resource is healthy and if current fishing regulations are working correctly. Without fishing regulations, California's marine resources would soon disappear.

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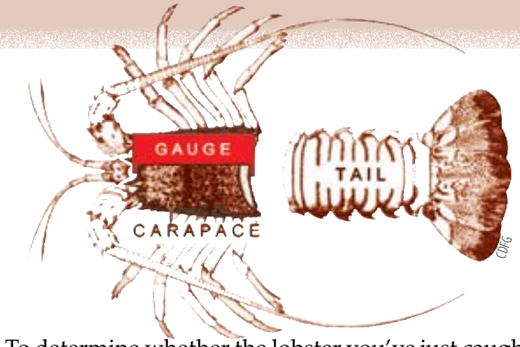
How to Measure Lobster



To determine whether the lobster you've just caught is large enough to keep, you must measure the length of the body shell, or *carapace*, along the mid-line from the rear edge of the eye socket (between the horns) to the rear edge of the carapace with a lobster gauge (*see diagram above*). This straight-line measurement should be a minimum of 3¼ inches. The carapace of a legal-sized lobster is larger than or equal to the gauge's cutout. If the lobster is too small, it should immediately be released back into the water. Undersized lobster should never be brought aboard a vessel, or ashore if diving from the beach.

Current spiny lobster sport fishing regulations can be found in the Ocean Sport Fishing regulation booklet, available at most sporting goods stores and wherever fishing licenses are sold, or on the Department of Fish and Game Web site at:

www.dfg.ca.gov/regulations

Do you have questions about California spiny lobster or lobster fishing? Contact your local Department office or visit the following online resource:

www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/faqindex.asp

Help Fish and Game Wardens Put an End to Poaching

If you witness poaching or polluting, call

1-888-DFG-CALTIP

(1-888-334-2258)

Alternate communication formats of this document are available upon request. If reasonable accommodation is needed, call DFG at (916) 322-8911. The California Relay Service for the deaf or hearing-impaired can be utilized from TDD phones at (800) 735-2929.

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CALIFORNIA SPINY LOBSTER

fishing and life history information

California Spiny Lobster

"Bugs" from the Deep

The California spiny lobster, *Panulirus interruptus*, is common from Point Conception, California to Magdalena Bay on the west coast of Baja California, Mexico.

Among the more than 40 species of spiny lobsters known worldwide, the California spiny lobster is one of the largest. Males can reach three feet long and weigh up to 26 pounds. There is currently no reliable method for aging lobster, but the California spiny lobster is thought to live for 50 years or more.

Scuba diver displays a California spiny lobster. When attempting to capture lobster, avoid grasping the legs or antennae as lobster that escape with broken appendages produce fewer offspring while recuperating.

Like all crustaceans, the California spiny lobster must shed, or *molt*, its outer shell repeatedly to grow, and may molt about 40 times before reaching legal harvest size.

Unlike the East Coast lobster, *Homarus americanus*, the California spiny lobster lacks large, powerful front claws. To defend itself, it relies on sharp spines on the body shell, tail, and whip-like antennae. If these fail, the lobster can rapidly swim away from danger by flexing its powerful tail.

Common spiny lobster predators include giant sea bass, California sheephead, cabezon, horn shark, leopard shark, octopus, sea otters, and man.

The spiny lobster is a nocturnal scavenger that feeds on fishes, sea urchins, clams, mussels, snails, worms, algae, or even weak or injured lobster. During the day, it shelters in caves and crevices. Rocky reefs and other hard-bottom substrates are its preferred habitat, but it may also favor manmade habitats such as jetties, piers, rock seawalls, breakwaters, artificial reefs, and other structures that provide food and shelter. Surfgrass and eelgrass beds can also be productive lobster hunting grounds. At night, when it is out foraging, lobster can sometimes be found on exposed sand or mud bottoms.

Spiny lobster usually move into shallow water during spring and summer, and migrate to deeper water in fall and winter. Adult lobster have been found as deep as 240 feet during the winter, possibly to avoid the effects of stormy weather.

A "berried" female lobster with thousands of bright orange eggs attached to the swimmerets on the underside of her tail.

Spiny Lobster Reproduction

The reproductive cycle begins in January and runs though April, when mature males attach packets of sperm (called *spermatophores*) to the undersides of every available female. Female lobster move into shallow, warmer water in late March and April, and extrude and fertilize their eggs in May and June.

Females carrying eggs are said to be *berried*. A large female lobster can produce 800,000 eggs, only a tiny fraction of which will survive to adulthood. Although there is currently no regulation prohibiting the take of egg-bearing females, many sport and commercial fishermen release them as a matter of conservation etiquette.

After 10 weeks of incubation, lobster eggs hatch into tiny young that drift with ocean currents for up to nine months. Lobster larvae have been found as far as 350 miles offshore and as deep as 400 feet below the surface. After six to nine months they molt into miniature versions of adult lobster, complete with swimmerets which they use to propel themselves on a search for suitable habitat. When they find nearshore nursery areas, such as surfgrass beds, they settle and molt into juvenile lobster.

Spiny lobster reach legal size between seven and 11 years of age. Legal-sized lobster average one pound in weight. Males grow faster, live longer, and reach larger sizes than females.

Did You Know... Spiny lobster off San Diego sometimes travel more than half a mile scavenging for food, according to a study funded by the California Department of Fish and Game and California Sea Grant. For more information, visit the California Sea Grant Web site at: **www.csgc.ucsd.edu/NEWSROOM/NEWSRELEASES/SpinyLobsters.html**

Spiny Lobster Sport Fishing

Tasty Rewards for Hoop Netters and Divers

Spiny lobster, or "***bugs***" as they are affectionately called by those who pursue them, are taken by free divers, scuba divers, and hoop netters. Divers may only use their (gloved) hands to capture lobster— no snares or other devices are allowed. Fishermen may use hoop nets to catch lobster from vessels or from shore (including man-made structures such as piers).

The sport take of spiny lobster, especially using hoop nets, has grown rapidly since 2005. Hoop netters have taken to boats, kayaks, jet skis, paddle boards, and even surfboards to set their hoop nets in prime habitat. The design and efficiency of hoop nets has also evolved rapidly in the last few years. A number of new hoop net designs with rigid frames are now widely available.

Traditional hoop net with two large metal rings joined by collapsible mesh netting.

Hoop netting hints

Use an oily or aromatic bait to disperse a scent trail that nearby lobster can follow back to the net. Common baits such as squid, Pacific mackerel, bonito, anchovies, sardines, and even meats like raw chicken are proven lobster attractants. Perforated cans of cat food are another option. Invest in a wire mesh bait container to guard against loss of bait to fish or other large predators such as seals and sea lions.

Diver hints

Lobster have hair-trigger escape responses. At the slightest disturbance, they can propel themselves backwards with powerful flips of the tail. Divers have a much better chance of catching lobster if they pin the lobster's body against the bottom. Pinning is preferred to grabbing the legs or antennae, which will frequently break or pull off. A recent study found that spiny lobster with broken legs or antennae produce fewer offspring because of the huge energy requirements of limb regeneration.

Preserving and preparing the lobster catch

By law, spiny lobster must be kept whole and not tailed until brought ashore, so size can be determined. Lobster should be kept alive until cooked in any case, because the quality of the flesh declines rapidly once it dies. Lobster that remains cool and damp in a sack or ice chest moistened with a little salt water, or covered with wet seaweed, can live for hours.

One of the easiest and quickest methods for cooking lobster is boiling, which takes only 10 to 15 minutes depending on the size and number of lobster being cooked. Lobster turn bright red when boiled. Broiling and barbequing are also good cooking choices.