

Spiny Lobster Fact Sheet

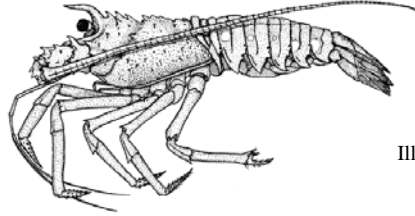


Illustration courtesy of NOAA



Common names: Caribbean spiny lobster, Florida lobster

Latin name: *Panulirus argus*

Characteristics:

- Grow to a maximum of 9-10 inches carapace length, 15-20 pounds and live more than 20 years.
- The peak mating season is March through July. A female lobster can produce from 250,000 to over 1 million eggs per spawning, dependent upon size, and larger lobsters may spawn two to three times during each mating season.
- Newly hatched lobster drift on ocean currents for nine months before settling to the bottom and developing into a juvenile lobster. Reproductive maturity typically is achieved two years after settlement, at a carapace length of about three inches. Male lobsters grow faster than females.

Distribution:

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

Local Fisheries:

- 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.
- Commercial harvest is conducted with traps; recreational harvest is by hand.

Management:

- The most recent stock assessment (2005) indicated that spiny lobster populations are sustainable.
- The commercial and recreational fisheries are open from August 6 through March 30 with a special two day sport season in late July. The closed season protects lobsters during the peak of spawning. Regulations prohibit the harvest of egg-bearing females at all times.
- Legal minimum size is 3-inch carapace length, allowing most lobsters to spawn before harvest.
- 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.
- Illegal importation of undersized lobsters does occur. In early 2006 a Miami-based seafood company was convicted of importing over 40 shipments (over 16,500 pounds) of undersized frozen lobster tails from Jamaica. (These tails were undersized by Jamaican law, thus import violated the Lacey Act). The boxes were mislabeled to suggest that they contained legally harvested tails. The illegal imports were destined for a distribution company in Norfolk, VA.
- A lobster with a three-inch carapace length (legal size limit in the U.S.) has a tail weighing just over 4 oz. Though some countries allow harvest below three-inch carapace length, and are legal to import to the U.S., these lobsters were most likely not reproductively mature before they were harvested. **Chefs should avoid buying tails less than 4 oz. in weight.**

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