



California Spiny Lobsters information provided by the DFG web site.

Spiny lobster (*Panulirus interruptus*)

Status of the Population:

Population size is unknown for the California spiny lobster (Leet et al. 2001). Commercial landings have fluctuated through the years and are influenced by some factors that are independent of the health of the population (such as water temperature, oceanographic patterns, weather and the export market). The closed season protects egg-carrying and molting female lobsters. The size limit ensures that there will be several year classes of broodstock, even if all legal-size lobsters are caught each season. The escape port has been effective in reducing the capture and handling of juvenile lobster. The Department has had a commercial logbook system in place since 1973. Catch effort, the numbers of legal and short lobsters taken, number of traps fished, and depths where the traps are fished are required information on the logs. The consistent presence of lobsters under legal size is generally a good indicator of a healthy fishery and population (Leet et al. 2001).

Home Range/Migratory Patterns:

A large portion of the lobster population makes an annual offshore-onshore migration that is stimulated by water temperature. During winter months they are found offshore at depths of 50 feet or greater. In late March through May lobsters move into shallow, warmer on shore waters less than 30 feet. In late October and November declining water temperatures and storm surge will move the lobsters offshore again. The spiny lobster is a southern California species with the majority of the population found in rocky areas between Point Conception and Magdalena Bay, Baja California, Mexico.

Current Regulations:

The commercial spiny lobster trap fishery is restricted access with 246 permittees. The current capacity goal is 225 trappers. There is an annual lobster lottery for lobster crewmembers if any new permits are available. The closed season is mid-March through September, the opening being the first Wednesday in October for commercial and the first Saturday before that for recreational take. All traps must be marked with a buoy bearing a P and the permittee's license number, have lobster escape ports, and trap destruct devices. Logbooks are required. The minimum size of lobster is 3 ¼ inches carapace length for both commercial and sport take. Recreational divers may only use their hands to take lobsters, and their bag limit is seven a day. Current regulations appear to be effective at managing the lobster fishery and resource.

How MPAs May Help:

Reserves could protect the shallow surf grass beds that are the required nursery areas for juvenile lobster. Trophy-size lobster of both sexes, which are also the most fecund, are becoming scarce, and a network of reserves would protect these individuals and allow them to reproduce. The absence of these large adults also has ecosystem effects, as they are predators on species like mussels and urchins. Lobster have extremely long and complex larval stages. It is thought, based on plankton surveys and ocean currents, that most of the lobster settling in California are produced in Mexico. Thus it is unclear whether lobster within MPAs in California would add to the population outside MPAs.