



Special measuring gauge

The regulations require that, in cases of dispute, a red rock lobster must be measured with an official, certified gauge. You may measure with an uncertified gauge or a ruler, but these can serve only as a guide. Certified gauges are available from MFish offices.

Other rules

Handgathering is the only harvest method allowed to divers. It is illegal to use any spear or device which could puncture the shell when taking rock lobster or possess any rock lobster which has been speared. Rock lobster pots are the only other legal method of capture. In addition to regulation escape gaps, all pots and surface floats must be marked clearly, legibly and permanently with the initials and surname of the fisher. **It is illegal to use baited set nets to take rock lobster.**

Fishers must immediately return egg bearing (berried) female lobster or any lobster in the soft shell stage to the water.

Special care should be taken to return all lobster onto suitable habitat immediately so that mortalities from exposure to sun and wind, or attacks by predators as they swim to shelter, are minimised. **It is illegal for recreational and customary fishers to sell their catch.**

Your local Ministry of Fisheries office

Kaitia Whangarei Auckland Hamilton Whitianga Tauranga Opotiki Gisborne Napier Masterton Wellington New Plymouth Nelson Christchurch Dunedin Invercargill Chatham Islands Blenheim

www.fish.govt.nz

Sustainable fisheries within a healthy aquatic ecosystem

For information on fishing rules
0800 4 RULES (0800 478 537)

To report illegal fishing
0800 4 POACHER (0800 476 224)

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Ministry of
Fisheries
Te Tautiaki i nga tini a Tangaroa

Stuck between a rock and a hard place? Getting to grips with handling and measuring lobster



New Zealand Government



New Zealand rock lobsters found around our coastline and offshore islands, are referred to as "crayfish", a name more correctly applied to freshwater species. They are often fished by commercial, recreational and by Maori customary fishers.

The sustainable management of our rock lobster fisheries is supported by an extensive research programme and an enforcement and compliance regime.

What can you do to look after the fishery?

We ask all fishers to comply with the regulations so there will be plenty of rock lobsters for future generations.

- Rock lobster that must be returned to the sea should be done so immediately and with care to maximise their chances of survival.
- Know the size limits, bag limits and other fishing rules for your area.
- Avoid grasping rock lobster by their legs or the antennae. Legs and feelers are easily detached and injured lobsters seldom survive.
- Do not take female rock lobsters with their tails tucked in underneath them; they are carrying thousands of eggs.
- Lobster rapidly go blind in sunlight. Measure them as soon as they leave the water and quickly return illegal lobster to where they can find shelter.
- Pots should not be left baited and unattended for more than 24 hours. Octopus can enter pots and will kill any rock lobster that cannot escape.

Description

New Zealand has two common species of rock lobster: the red or spiny rock lobster *Jasus edwardsii* and the green or packhorse rock lobster *Jasus verreauxi*.

The packhorse, the world's largest rock lobster, can be as large as 60 cm and 15 kg. Red rock lobster are generally smaller, but have been measured at 54 cm overall length and weighing over 8 kg.

Distribution, habitat and movement

Both Red rock lobsters and Packhorse rock lobsters are widespread throughout New Zealand, particularly in coastal areas where there is plenty of cover.

Rock lobsters usually move by night to search for food and shelter, returning to the safety of crevices during the day.

They eat a wide variety of bottom life, with a preference for shellfish, crabs, seaweeds, small fish and sea urchins.

There is also a seasonal movement into shallow water for moulting and mating, and another when females move to the edges of reefs to spawn their eggs.

Rock lobster migrate in large numbers. Movements of up to 460 km by red rock lobsters, and up to 1070 km by packhorse lobster have been recorded.

Growth and age

To increase size, a rock lobster must shed or moult its shell and grow a new larger one which is initially soft, leaving it very vulnerable to predators. It absorbs water rapidly and expands to its new size. The shell hardens within a few days, taking longer to thicken to full strength. Moulting frequency and times depend on age and sex.

Legal size is attained in 5-10 years, depending on the sex of the lobster, area, and growth rates. Rock lobster may live for over 30 years.

Recreational fishery

Recreational fishing for the daily limit (6 legal rock lobster per fisher) is largely based on diving, but baited pots are also used.

Life cycle

Mating occurs within a few weeks of the female moult. Females bear up to 550,000 eggs depending on locality and their size. Eggs are carried under the tail, for up to 6 months before hatching. The eggs hatch into spider-like larvae that drift freely as part of the plankton in open waters for at least 9-12 months, where they fall prey to a variety of plankton feeders. The survivors may move considerable distances with ocean currents, returning to inshore areas to settle on the bottom as transparent puerulii, which resemble miniature adults. At this stage they may suffer heavy predation from bottom feeding fish, until they find adequate shelter.

Recreational fishing can have a significant impact on stocks in some areas.

The need for different minimum legal sizes

Tail width measurement is used to determine the legal size for red or spiny rock lobster. Females of similar body sizes have wider tails than males, so different minimum legal sizes are needed for each. This contributes to the effectiveness of the escape gaps that must be used in all rock lobster pots. Escape gaps reduce the damage to, and possible mortalities of, juvenile rock lobster.

Pot Limits

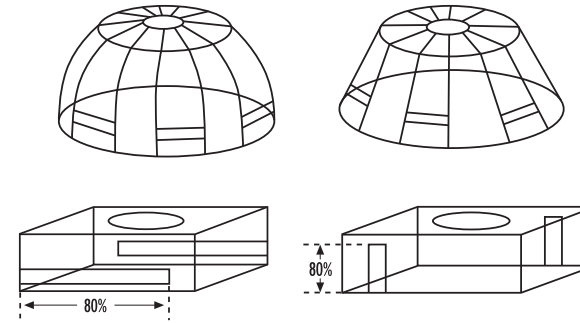
Know the rock lobster pot limits:

- Individuals may use, set, or possess up to three rock lobster pots in any one day.
- Two or more individuals fishing from a vessel may use, set, or possess up to six rock lobster pots in any one day.
- Paterson Inlet – Within Paterson Inlet, Stewart Island (those waters lying inside a line between Ackers Point and Bullers Point on The Neck), there is a limit of two rock lobster pots per person.
- Mimiwhangata – No person may use more than one pot per person per vessel.

Regulation escape gaps to allow undersized lobsters to escape

Round or beehive pots must have at least 3 escape gaps or apertures (other than the mouth). Each aperture must have an inside dimension of not less than 54 mm x 200 mm.

Square or rectangular pots must have at least two escape gaps or apertures (other than the mouth) in opposite faces of the pot. Each aperture shall not be less than 80% of the height or length of the face of the pot in which the apertures are contained.



Each aperture shall have an inside dimension of not less than 54 mm x 200 mm.

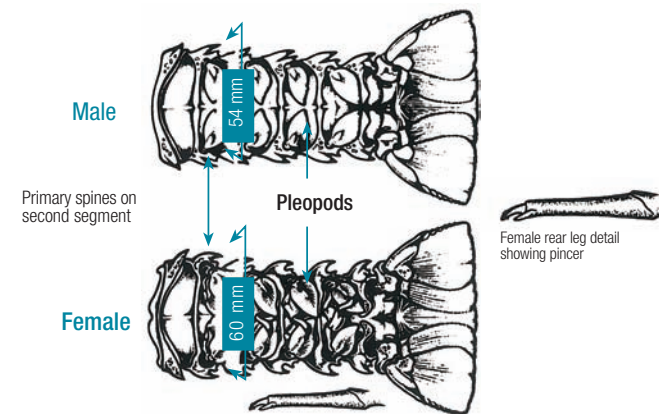
Any rock lobster pot constructed entirely of unaltered spot welded mesh with inside dimensions of 54 mm x 140 mm does not have to have escape gaps or apertures, but pots must be used without covers or liners or have covers or liners that leave unencumbered at least 80% of the surface area of each of 2 opposite sides.

No escape gap or aperture shall be incorporated in either the top or the bottom of any pot.

Determining a rock lobster sex

The sex is easily determined:

- Females have small pincers on the rear pair of legs.
- Pleopods are in paired form on each side of the underside of female tails and are in single form in male tails.
- If you are unsure of the sex use the 60 mm measurement and you will be safe.



Hold the lobster by the back of its carapace (hard shell), tail facing towards you. Turn it upside down. Gently fold out its tail and determine its sex.

Measuring red rock lobster

The tail width is measured in a straight line between the tips of the two large (primary) spines on the second segment of the tail, as shown in the diagrams opposite. The minimum sizes for red rock lobster are:

54 mm for males and 60 mm for females.

If a red rock lobster measures less than 54 mm for a male or less than 60 mm for a female, or if any part of the spines or shell on this segment is broken, the lobster can not be kept and must be returned to the sea, immediately and unharmed.

Measuring packhorse rock lobster

For packhorse rock lobster, the minimum tail length measure is 216 mm.

The tail is measured along the underside in a straight line from the rear of the calcified bar on the first segment to the tip of the middle fan of the tail.

