

Lobster fishing

more than pot luck

It is nearly time to dust off the rock lobster pots and get ready for the new season.

All rock lobster pots must be registered before they can be used. For information about registering pots, ring PIRSA Fisheries on (08) 8347 6107.

For each pot registered, an individually numbered and colour coded tag will be issued. This season, the tags are blue. The tag will show that the pot is registered. It must be attached as close as practicable to the red float so it can be seen from the surface.

This will allow Fisheries Officers to check the pot without disturbing it. PIRSA also suggests that you attach a separate tag that shows your name and address.

If your registration tag is lost, stolen or destroyed, replacement tags are available from PIRSA Fisheries offices during office hours, by post or from Fisheries Officers on uniformed patrol.

In these circumstances, it will be possible for fishers to continue using their rock lobster pots for up to 48 hours should their registration tag be lost.

Until a replacement tag is supplied, recreational fishers must mark their rock lobster pots with a temporary replacement tag showing the registered owner's name, date of birth, registration number and telephone number.

Here are some tips that might help you catch a feed of one of the real jewels of the sea.

- setting your pots is the most important part. Get that right, and you are well on your way to a good catch.
- rock lobster are attracted to pots by the use of bait. Good fresh bait can be the key to a good catch. Salmon is popular, but many are turning to carp as a cheaper and equally



Tag demonstrates the pot is registered

effective alternative. At the same time, using carp helps rid our freshwater environment of this pest.

- cut bait into chunks roughly the size of your fist. Cutting the bait into pieces enhances the smell of the bait.
- place the cut up fish in a bait basket, or on a wire toggle, and secure up and underneath the neck of the pot.
- ensure you have enough rope for the depth of water you are fishing, and that the pot and float are securely attached. Do not forget to allow for tidal variations. Many floats have disappeared under the surface with the incoming tide.
- use a sounder to help locate a patch of suitable reef.
- as you set your pot, be careful as the rope feeds out. Do not wrap the rope around your arm, hand or finger.
- once you have set your pots, they should be checked at least every 24 hours. Leaving them overnight will give the best results, as rock lobsters tend to feed under the cover of darkness.
- rock lobster fishing is more enjoyable and safer with a friend. One can steer the boat keeping an eye on sea conditions, while the other retrieves or sets the pot.
- when checking your pots, all rock lobster should be handled with care. First check to see if the rock lobster is female and carrying eggs. If so, it must be returned to the water immediately.
- measure your lobster and, if it is legal size, immediately clip the centre tail fan with a pair of scissors or sharp knife.
- look after your catch. If possible, place your catch in an ice slurry. This will prevent the rock lobster from becoming too stressed and will maintain the texture and flavour of the meat.
- keep an eye on the weather a few days in advance. Pots are often lost as a result of stormy weather. Remove your pots from the water if bad weather is on the way.
- if resetting your pots, consider adding fresh bait. You can never have too much bait.

Rules and regulations

A number of specific rules apply to rock lobster fishing in South Australia, and they are detailed in a brochure that is available at any PIRSA Fisheries Office or on the PIRSA web site at www.pir.sa.gov.au.

These rules are part of the overall management strategy to ensure the long-term health of the rock lobster fishery.

Some of the important rules to remember include:



Clip the centre tail fan with scissors or a sharp knife

Size limits

The minimum legal size for rock lobster caught in the northern zone is 10.5 centimetres. The northern zone includes the area of water west of the Murray Mouth (located at longitude 139°E), including Kangaroo Island, to the Western Australia border.

The minimum legal size for rock lobster caught in the southern zone is 9.85 centimetres. The southern zone includes the area of water east of the Murray Mouth (same longitude) to the Victorian border.

Rock lobster must be measured along the middle and on the top of the carapace (main body shell) from the front edge of the groove between the antennae (frontal tubercule) to the rear edge of the carapace, but not including any hairs attached to the carapace. Any measuring device must fit firmly into the groove between the antennae.

Closed seasons

Southern zone

The taking of rock lobster in the southern zone is prohibited between 6 pm on 30 April and 6 am on 1 October.

Northern zone

The taking of rock lobster in the northern zone is prohibited between 6 pm 31 May and noon on 1 November.

Bag limit

A maximum of 4 rock lobster per person per day may be taken, regardless of how they are taken.

Boat limit

When fishing from a boat, a maximum of 8 rock lobster per day may be taken. Where the rock lobster have been taken by only one person, whether by diving or drop net, hoop net or registered rock lobster pot, no more than one personal bag limit of 4 rock lobster may be taken.

Closed areas

Apart from seasonal closures, there are rock lobster sanctuaries where rock lobster are totally protected at all times. These are:

- Cape Jaffa.
- Margaret Brock Reef (within .55 nautical miles of the light).
- Rivoli Bay, including Penguin Island (from Glen Point to Cape Martin).
- Gleeson Landing and
- all aquatic reserves

Maps of these closures can be obtained from your local PIRSA Fisheries Office.

Removal of tail fan

All rock lobster taken by recreational fishers must have the middle tail fan clipped to a recognisable straight line before landing regardless of how taken. This should be done by using a pair of scissors. Failure to clip the middle tail fan may result in prosecution with a maximum penalty of \$2,000.

Recreational catch

It is illegal for recreational fishers to sell or trade their catch.

Protected females

Berried rock lobster (females carrying eggs) are protected at all times and must be handled with care and returned to the water immediately.



Probe into mixed success from the zones

The forthcoming rock lobster season will be the second since the introduction of an open access pot registration system for recreational fishers.

Prior to the 2001 season, the State Government lifted the restriction that previously limited the number of recreational pot licences in SA. Last season, 7,493 registrations were issued for a total of 13,275 pots.

While reports of catches from last season varied, it would be fair to say that those who fished in the south east (southern zone) did fairly well. Those who fished around Kangaroo Island, Yorke Peninsula and on the west coast (northern zone) found the pickings a bit lean.

The news continues to be good in the southern zone with the recent announcement that the total allowable catch for commercial fishers in that zone will increase by 50 tonnes this year.

Early feedback from recreational and commercial rock lobster fishers from the northern zone is not as promising. Catch rates in the northern zone are in decline, and there is a recognised need to take some form of management action to ensure the fishery continues on a sustainable basis.

The South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) is currently analysing the catch data provided by recreational and commercial fishers. It is also considering information from more than 1,700 recreational fishers via a diary/phone survey. SARDI will report on its findings before the end of the year.

Meanwhile, the State Government, in partnership with the commercial industry, has significantly reduced effort in the fishery for the coming season, and it is now looking at two possible future management options for the northern zone.

One option is the introduction of a total allowable catch, or quota system, to the

fishery. While new to the northern zone, this type of arrangement has been in place in the southern zone for a number of years. The second option is to further refine the current time management system.

Whichever option is chosen, it is important that some action is taken to address the declining catches, and allow the stock to rebuild.

Also under consideration across the whole State - for both the commercial and recreational sectors - is the mandatory use of escape gaps in rock lobster pots.

Currently, pots require either escape gaps or mesh with a diameter of 50 mm or greater. Recent trials have shown that pots fitted with escape gaps are much more efficient in releasing undersized rock lobsters, while also effectively retaining legal size lobsters.

Southern Fisheries will report on future direction for this important fishery.