

# Management of Spiny Lobsters (*Panulirus argus*) in the Caribbean Fishery Conservation Zone of the United States

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## RESUMEN

A tono con la autoridad que le confiere la Ley de Magnuson los Estados Unidos para la Conservación y Administración de las Pesquerías, el Consejo de Administración Pesquera del Caribe ha preparado un Plan para la administración de la pesquería de la langosta en la Zona de Conservación Pesquera del Caribe (límite de las 200 millas), incluyendo las aguas territoriales del Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico y el Territorio de las Islas Vírgenes de los Estados Unidos.

Gran parte de los recursos pesqueros bajo la jurisdicción del Consejo están íntimamente relacionados con los de otras naciones del Caribe como resultado de la translación de larvas plantónicas y migración de peces adultos. Esto es especialmente cierto en el caso de la langosta (*Panulirus argus*) en el área de las Antillas Menores. Sin embargo, se desconoce en qué proporción contribuyen a la población de langostas las larvas que son transportadas por las corrientes oceánicas.

Se desconoce, además, la aportación que se deriva localmente del desove de las langostas adultas que medran en esas mismas aguas. También se desconoce como contribuyen las larvas que se originan en aguas de la jurisdicción del Consejo a las pesquerías al oeste y norte del Caribe.

El rendimiento óptimo (OY) de la pesquería de langostas (para la Zona de Conservación) ha sido determinado como: "Todas las langostas sin huevas cuyo largo de carapacho (CL) sea de 3.5 pulgadas (88.9 mm) o más. Esta limitación en cuanto al tamaño del carapacho establecida en el Plan asegura que la mayor parte de las langostas habrán de reproducirse por lo menos una vez antes de ser capturadas. Dicha medida, conjuntamente con otras propuestas que serán examinadas por el ponente, debe proveer los controles adecuados para evitar la sobrepesca desde el punto de vista biológico a la vez que provee para que todos los grupos dependientes de la pesca de la langosta hagan un uso óptimo del recurso.

Under the authority of the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the Caribbean Fishery Management Council has prepared a spiny lobster fishery management plan for the United States' waters surrounding Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

The Caribbean Fishery Management Council fully recognizes the fact that Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are geographical members of the Caribbean community. As such, many, if not most, of its fishery resources are intimately linked by migrating adults and/or planktonic larvae to the same resources found in the waters of other Caribbean nations. This is, perhaps, especially true in the case of the spiny lobsters of the Lesser Antilles.

There are no numerical data which tell us how many recruits into our fishery are derived from larvae which are carried to us on ocean currents from the reefs of islands to the east and south as opposed to those coming from adult females in our own waters. Nor do we know if our larvae are recruited into fisheries to the west and north of us.

Despite this lack of knowledge, the fishery management plan contains the

following objectives and management measures: (1) Provide for biological conditions consistent with the ability to achieve a maximum sustainable yield (MSY); (2) Promote economic efficiency of the commercial fishery; (3) Provide for the social and cultural needs of Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands citizens; (4) Provide biologic, economic, and social data bases for future management of the resource, and (5) Reduce the loss of the resource which is associated with "ghost" or "drowned" or "lost" traps due to ship traffic, pilfering, thievery, displacement by current and other reasons.

Optimum yield (OY) was determined to be: All the "non-berried" lobsters in the management area having a carapace length (CL) of 3.5 in or greater. This amount is expected to range between the current catch of 700,000 lb and the MSY of 830,000 lb annually.

Since OY is all non-berried lobsters with a CL of 3.5 in or greater, the 830,000 estimate does not represent an upper limit and may be exceeded in any given year without resultant damage to the resource. This size limitation ensures that most lobsters have reproduced at least once before entering the fishery, and coupled with other proposed measures should provide an adequate safeguard against biological overfishing, and also provide for optimal use by all user groups. There is no surplus available and no foreign catch will be allowed.

The Council proposes management measures which include the following:

*Size and Sex Restrictions.* (1) Make unlawful the possession of, while on or above the surface of the water or land, any lobster of the species *Panulirus argus* which was taken contrary to the provisions of this plan. (2) Make unlawful the possession of, while on or above the surface of the water, any "berried" (gravid or egg bearing) lobster of the species *Panulirus argus* which was taken contrary to the provisions of this plan. (3) Make unlawful the practice of stripping or otherwise molesting egg-bearing (berried) spiny lobsters to remove the eggs. (4) Allow the retention of small (less than legal size) lobsters, alive, as an "attractor" in traps or pots, but only in traps or pots in which they were originally captured. (5) Allow the retention of egg-bearing (berried) female lobsters in the same pot or trap in which they were caught until the eggs are shed. (6) Require that spiny lobsters remain whole while on or below the surface of the water. The Secretary should recommend that Territorial and Commonwealth governments prohibit the importation of tails less than six (6) in. in length.

*Sanctuaries (Recommendations to National Park Service).* (1) Make unlawful the taking of lobsters of the species *Panulirus argus* or the possession of any lobsters taken, in the waters of the Virgin Islands National Park from a point due north of the west end of Mary Point southwest to the Visitors Center in Cruz Bay. (2) Require the return to the water of lobsters of the species *Panulirus argus* which are captured as an incidental catch in traps in the waters of the Virgin Islands National Park as described above.

*Data Collection.* Require the reporting of catch and effort information through the improvement of the existing data collection system.

*Gear Restrictions.* (1) Require a self-destruct panel and/or self-destruct door fastenings on traps and pots. (2) Require owner identification and marking of traps, pots, buoys, and boats. (3) Prohibit the use of poisons, drugs or other

chemicals for the taking of spiny lobsters. (4) Prohibit the use of spears, hooks, explosives or similar devices for the taking of spiny lobsters. Capture by hand, snare, net, trap or pot is allowed.