

# Lobster Management & Enhancement

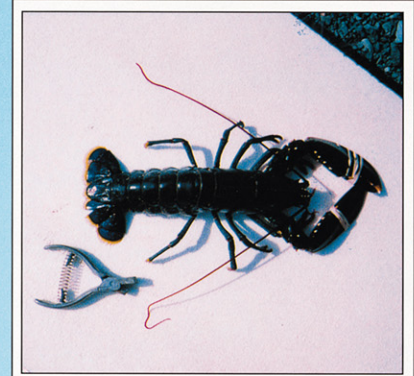


Lobsters are usually fished with baited creels (pots) which are fished in strings along the sea bed and hauled every day. Special escape gaps can be incorporated into creels to reduce the numbers of undersize lobsters in the catch. Biodegradable panels can be incorporated into lobster creels and they disintegrate if the creel is lost at sea thereby preventing the creel from 'ghost fishing'.

The European lobster, *Homarus gammarus* (L.), is distributed throughout the coastal Atlantic waters of north west Europe from the Mediterranean sea to the coast of Norway. The centre of its distribution is in the waters around Ireland and Britain. The lobster is a solitary nocturnal animal and is usually found on rocky areas of the sea bed down to depths of 100 metres or more where it hides in crevices amongst the rocks. It is one of Ireland's most valuable crustacean shellfish fisheries with first sale values averaging over £ 4 million per annum. It is estimated that there are over 1200 lobster fishermen in Ireland many of whom are totally dependent on lobsters for a living.

In times gone by it was possible for a lobster fisherman to make a reasonable living from fifty or a hundred creels. However the development of better boats and superior equipment has allowed for larger numbers of creels to be fished with the result that stock levels have been reduced. This has prompted fishermen to take action, such as the formation of the Irish Lobster Association, in 1994, to work on management and enhancement of the stocks in co-operation with BIM and other state agencies. Sound management of lobster stocks involves v-notch programmes, releases of hatchery reared juvenile lobsters and strict compliance with minimum size regulations.

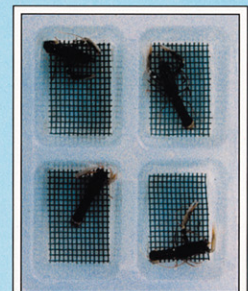
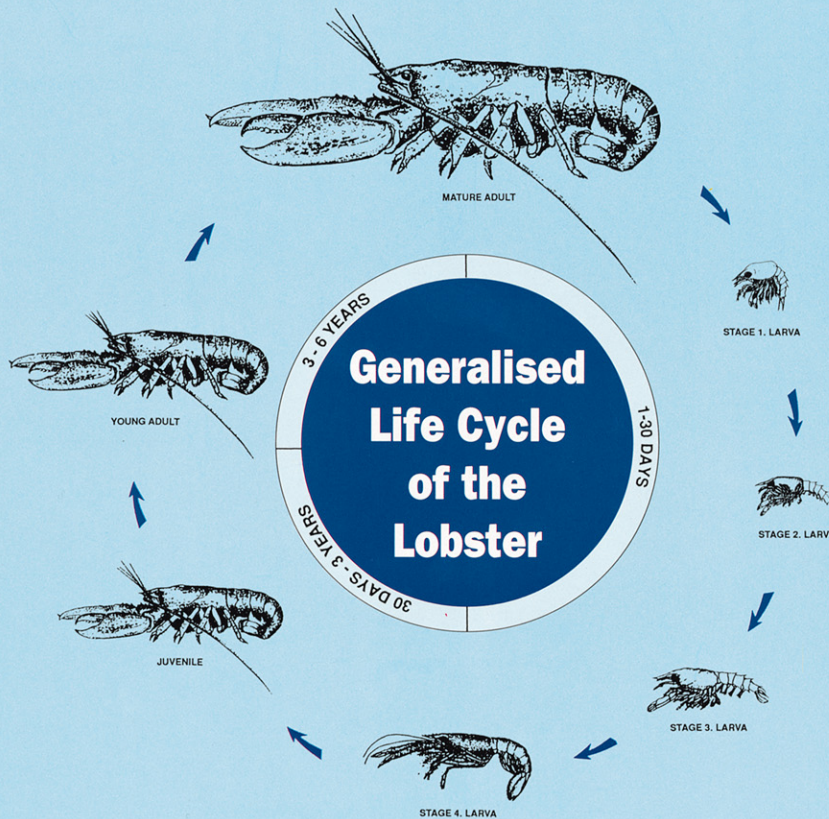
The Irish Lobster industry though heavily fished is still relatively healthy in European terms. The conservation ethos of U.S. fishermen in Maine is seen as a very desirable way forward by Irish Lobster Fishermen.



In the Republic of Ireland the Department of the Marine has introduced a ban on the landing or sale of v-notched lobsters. A v-notch can be cut in the tail of a lobster using a special notching tool. The notch normally remains visible for about six years or three moults during which time the lobster will spawn at least three times. By v-notching lobsters, fishermen help to build up the size of the spawning stock.

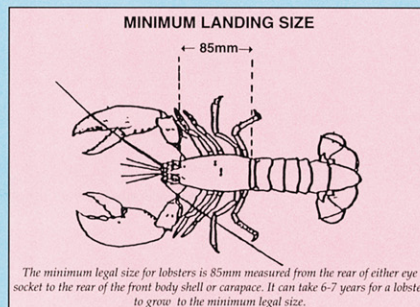
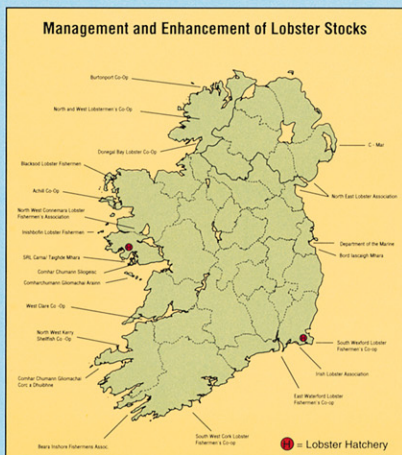


A mature female lobster can carry anything from 7,000 to 100,000 eggs and is said to be "berried". The eggs attach to the underside of the lobster with the help of adhesive secretions. They change in colour from dark green to black and red and they increase in size before hatching. (Photo © SFIA Ardree)



Juvenile lobsters can be reared in a hatchery from the egg stage. After about six months they can be released back into the sea where a percentage of them should survive to grow to commercial size in six or seven years, helping to restock depleted fisheries.

Lobsters usually mate in the early part of the summer when a moulted or soft female will mate with a hard shelled male. A mature female lobster can produce anything from 7,000 to 100,000 eggs depending on her size. When the eggs hatch the free swimming larvae which are produced moult three times over a one month period. Following the third moult the lobster takes on the appearance of a miniature adult and settles down to life on the sea bed where it will moult 26-30 times before reaching marketable size in a period of 6-7 years.



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