

Western Rock Lobster



Photo: Department of Fisheries WA

Description

The western rock lobster can be found off the western coast of Australia with majority of the population living between Perth and Geraldton. It is one of the family of 'spiny' lobsters. They have a long antennae which is used as a communication tool, defensive weapon and to help in finding their way around. The western rock lobster has an exoskeleton that supports and protects its body and is usually reddish-purple in colour. They can reach up to 90 centimetres in length and 5 kilograms in weight. They have six pairs of small limbs around the mouth and five pairs of walking legs.

Diet & Habitat

Western rock lobsters feed on a wide range of food sources such as coralline algae, detritus, mollusks and crustaceans. They live as a free swimming larvae in the ocean for the first year of their life and can live up to 1,500 kilometres from the coastline. As the lobster grows it returns back to the coast to live on reefs in water 40 meters deep, or less. After approximately 5 years it will migrate further away from shore to deeper waters of up to 90 meters in depth and use coral and rock crevices for shelter.

Scientific name

Panulirus cygnus

Other names

Crayfish

Cray

Lobster

Social Life

Lobsters can live in the wild up to 100 years but it is expected that the average lobster will live to approximately 30 years. When the female releases their eggs only 1/10 will survive. For example, if a female laid 10,000 eggs only 10 would survive. Western rock lobsters live independently until they reach juvenile stage when they gather together with other lobsters in protective habitats.

Threats

The western rock lobster is eaten by a number of large fish species such as snapper and sharks as well as octopus. The largest predator to the lobster is humans. Western Australia's western rock lobster fishery is very lucrative bringing in upwards of 180 million dollars a year to Western Australia's economy. It is one of the best managed and most sustainable fisheries in the world though with bag, size, age and season limits in place to maintain and protect future populations.

Did you know?

The western rock lobster actually regrows any legs and antennae that have been lost usually from encounters with predators such as octopus or large fish.

