

Rock lobster

Recreational fishing guide
2023/24



A current licence is required to fish for any species of rock lobster

Please note:

NEW Changes to landing and possession of rock lobster. See page 5.

- Fishing is permitted year-round.
- A maximum of 2 floats may be attached to your pot.
- You may not pull a pot without surface floats under any circumstances. Please advise DPIRD officers of the location.
- Pot rope arrangements now only required from 1 April to 31 October in any year.

Important disclaimer

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Fish for the future

Western Australia's fisheries management strategies have one primary goal - ensuring we have fish for the future. This can only be achieved by making sure our fisheries are ecologically sustainable.

An integrated approach to management takes into account the impact of fishing by recreational and commercial sectors, plus the effect of other human activities on the State's ecosystems.

Scientific research and monitoring underpins the management of the State's fisheries and marine resources. We are developing a growing understanding of the biology of fish populations and their natural variations in number from year to year, as well as their vulnerability to fishing and the impact of other human activities.

The annual *Status Reports of the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources of Western Australia* provides detailed information on the state of WA's fisheries and is available at **fish.wa.gov.au/about-us/publications**

Fisheries management plans and regulations are adjusted in response to increased knowledge and changes in the impact of human activities. The implementation of the rules is designed to facilitate a safe and enjoyable fishing experience.

Information on lobster science is available at **fish.wa.gov.au/species/rock-lobster**

Recreational fishing rules

Licences

You must have a licence to fish for any species of rock lobster and produce it when requested to by a DPIRD Fisheries and Marine Officer. Apply for a new licence or renew an existing licence online at the fisheries website. Alternatively, application forms are available from our offices, the website at **fish.wa.gov.au** and the DoTDirect website.

You are not permitted to sell or use recreationally caught rock lobster for any gain or reward (including barter or exchange for other goods or services or raffles or fundraisers).

Fishing season and times

Statewide:

All species of lobster may be taken all year.



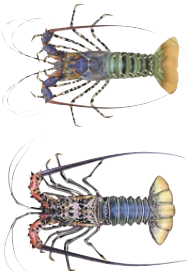
Night fishing ban:

A seasonal night fishing ban applies southwards of the North West Cape. A person must not pull pots or fish for rock lobster by diving during the below dates and times:

15 October – 31 March, 7.30pm – 4.30am

1 April – 14 October, 6.00pm – 6.00am

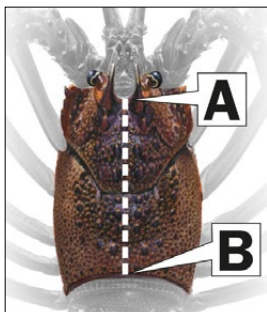
Legal size limits for taking lobsters

Species		Minimum legal carapace length
	<p>Southern rock lobster (<i>Jasus edwardsii</i>) Identifiable by a single spine between and just forward of their eyes</p>	98.5mm
	<p>Western rock lobster (<i>Panulirus cygnus</i>) Identifiable by a single white dot on the outside (lateral) edge of each tail segment</p>	76mm
	<p>Tropical rock lobsters: Ornate (<i>Panulirus ornatus</i>) Painted (green) (<i>Panulirus versicolor</i>)</p>	76mm

See how to measure lobsters below.

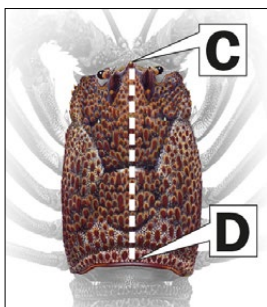
Western and tropical rock lobster

Place the end of a gauge over the ridge between the two spikes at the front of the rock lobster's head (A) and the other end of the gauge over the back of the carapace (B).



Southern rock lobster

Place the end of a gauge over the groove at the base of the antennae at the front of the lobster's head (C) and the other end of the gauge over the back of the carapace (D).



Statewide catch limits

Bag limit (maximum Statewide)



8 rock lobsters per licensed fisher, per day, of which no more than 4 may be tropical rock lobsters (see page 3 for tropical species).

After pulling a lobster pot, you must immediately and carefully release all rock lobster that are in excess of the bag limit and/or totally protected (see page 17 for more details on totally protected lobsters).

Divers cannot return to their vessel or come ashore with more than their bag limit.

Possession limits

This means the maximum number of rock lobsters you may have in your possession, even if they were not all taken from the sea on the same day. A possession limit of **24** rock lobsters per person applies, including at your principal place of residence.

You can only be in possession of rock lobster tails on the landward side of the high water mark. Rock lobster must be in whole form when on a vessel unless it is being prepared for immediate consumption or the part of the rock lobster is not a tail.

Note: The landing of rock lobster in whole form enables compliance staff to check the size of your catch.

This means you are able to take rock lobster tails to a friend's house for consumption and use rock lobster heads as bait.

Rock lobster must not be transported unaccompanied, such as by a courier service.

Your principal place of residence does not include a tent, vehicle, boat or caravan (unless you live permanently in the caravan).

Boat limit

This means the maximum number of rock lobsters you may carry on a boat at any one time. If there is only 1 licensed fisher on board, the maximum is 1 day's bag limit (8), including no more than 4 tropical rock lobsters. If there are 2 licensed fishers on board, it is 2 days' bag limit (16), including no more than 8 tropical rock lobsters. If 3 or more licensed fishers are on board, it is 3 days' bag limit (24), including no more than 12 tropical rock lobsters.

Fishing for lobsters

Diving

Divers may only catch rock lobster by hand, a hand-held snare or a blunt crook.

Spears, nets and other similar items that can damage rock lobster are illegal.

Divers should measure and count rock lobsters in the water. Check each rock lobster as you catch it to determine if it is totally protected (see page 17). If totally protected, release it carefully and immediately, before another rock lobster is captured.

DPIRD Fisheries and Marine Officers in normal circumstances allow five minutes from when a diver returns to the vessel for divers to sort, recheck for any totally protected lobster and tail clip their catch (see page 17), before undertaking their inspection.

Illegal baits

You may not fish for rock lobster using any bovine material (other than gelatine or tallow), skin or hide, anything to which mammal skin or hide is attached, abalone material.

Pot limits

No more than 2 rock lobster pots per licence holder. A maximum of 6 pots may be pulled when there are 3 or more licensed fishers on board per boat trip.

No more than 6 pots may be pulled per boat trip. No more than 6 pots may be carried on a boat at any time.

Pots must be set and pulled by the licence holder. *Pulling and setting someone else's*

pot is illegal unless that person is on board the boat. This includes for the purpose of re-baiting the pot. Even if you have permission from a friend or family member to pull their pot, it is still illegal.

Removing someone else's float from a pot and replacing it with your own is also illegal.

If you locate a pot that appears to be abandoned or a pot rope with no floats attached, do not touch the pot and report the GPS location of the pot via FishWatch on 1800 815 507.

Sharing pots

2 licensed fishers are permitted to share rock lobster pots. Each licensed fisher must have their own separate float with their issued personal gear identification (ID) marked on the float. No more than 2 floats, each with only one gear ID number, must be attached.

Each licensed fisher may use no more than 2 pots to fish for lobster, even when sharing pots, and may not have their gear ID number on more than 2 pots, including when sharing pots.

Fishers are not permitted to bring home lobsters on behalf of the person who shares their pot and may only take and land their own bag limit.

Pot specifications

Various types of pots – batten, beehive (cane) and other pots (such as moulded plastic pots) – can be used. Before using pots, check that they conform to standards set out in the *Fish Resources Management Regulations 1995*. These standards are outlined below.

A pot must not exceed 1,000mm in diameter or width at its widest point and 500mm in height.

Entrance and escape gaps

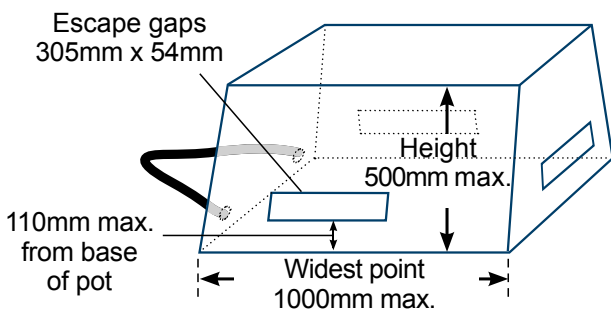
Pots must have only 1 entrance. The neck must be rigid and at least 160mm wide.

Pots must not have any internal partitions or chambers. Escape gaps and the neck must not be obstructed.

North of North West Cape, pots do not require escape gaps. Between North West Cape and Cape Leeuwin, pots must have at least **3 escape gaps**. In the waters south and east of Cape Leeuwin, pots must have at least **1 escape gap**.

Escape gaps must be as far away as practical from the hauling rope attachment points and no more than 110mm above the base of the pot. They must not be obstructed by ballast, rope or anything else. Gaps must not be between the hauling rope attachment points on any type of pot.

Each escape gap must be a minimum of 54mm high and 305mm wide and made of rigid material that can't reduce the internal measurements of the escape gap.



To help prevent pot theft and illegal pot pulling, and to help us identify lost or stolen pots, we encourage fishers to engrave their gear identification number into their own pots – if possible, on the frame and on the end where the hauling ropes are attached (for example, see the batten pot image below).



Float requirements

Surface floats must be fitted to every pot rope. They must be at least 15cm in diameter and stamped or branded with the licence holder's gear ID number, with lettering 6cm high and at least 1cm wide.

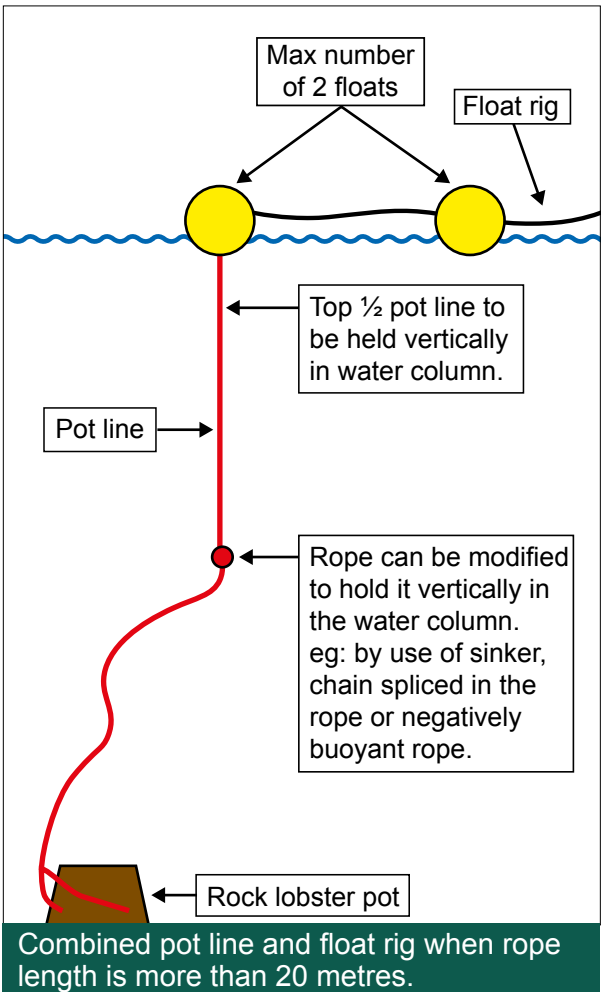
You may only have 2 floats attached to your pot at any time, regardless of the length of rope you are fishing with or if you are pot sharing. Please note: the use of pool noodles is not permitted.

Rope requirements

When more than 20m of rope length (combined pot line and float rig) is attached to a pot, fishers must ensure that the top half of the pot line rope is hung vertically in the water column (see diagram on page 10).

This applies to recreational fishers from 1 April to 31 October in any year.

'Pot line' means the length of rope between the first surface float and the bridle. 'Float rig' means the rope on the surface of the water connected to the first surface float and the last surface float, including any rope that extends beyond the last surface float (see diagram below).



Reducing the amount of rope on the surface of the water will minimise the risk of gear entanglements with migrating humpback whales during the winter months and will reduce the loss of fishing gear from entanglement with other fishing boats.

Suggested methods for hanging pot rope vertically in the water column:

- Attach a weight to the rope, half way down the pot line.
- Replace the top half of the pot line rope with negatively buoyant rope.

Ways to safely and efficiently weight the rope:

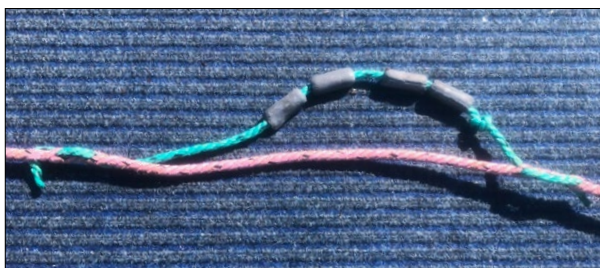
- Attach a 'shark clip' to a snapper sinker and attach to the pot line rope.
- Attach (splice) a small piece of rope with sinkers attached, into the main pot line rope (see below).



Shark clips



Snapper sinker



Splice attached to main pot line

It is recommended that fishers use at least a 16 ounce (~450 gram) weight to ensure the rope remains vertical in the water column.

Rope coiling

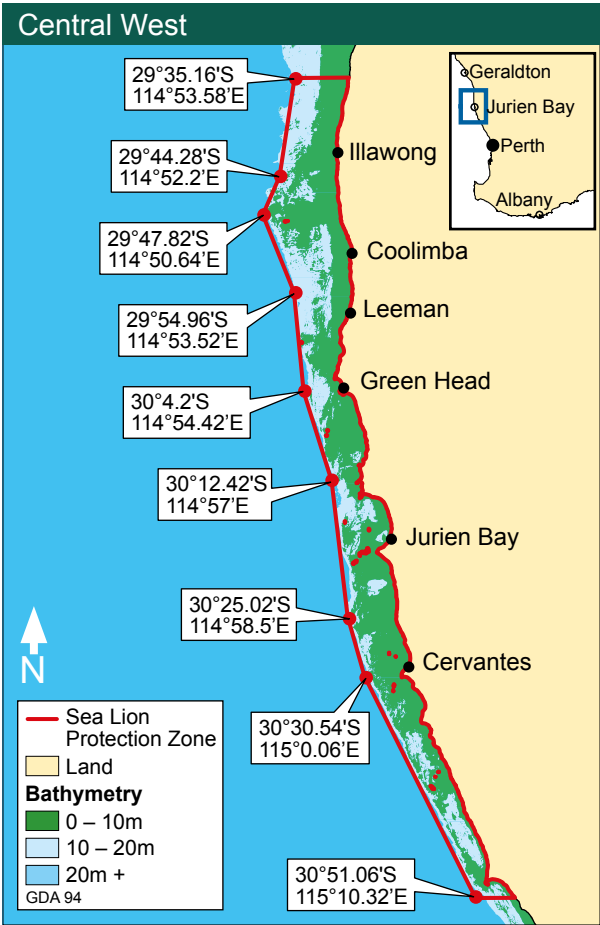
Coiling and tying up excess rope on the surface of the water is called 'dog boning' and is permitted although not encouraged due to the risk of rope coming undone or lengthening if not secured correctly.

Fishers must ensure the dog bone or coiled rope is held securely – any dog bone or rope coil that comes undone may result in the combined pot and float line rope exceeding 20m in length.

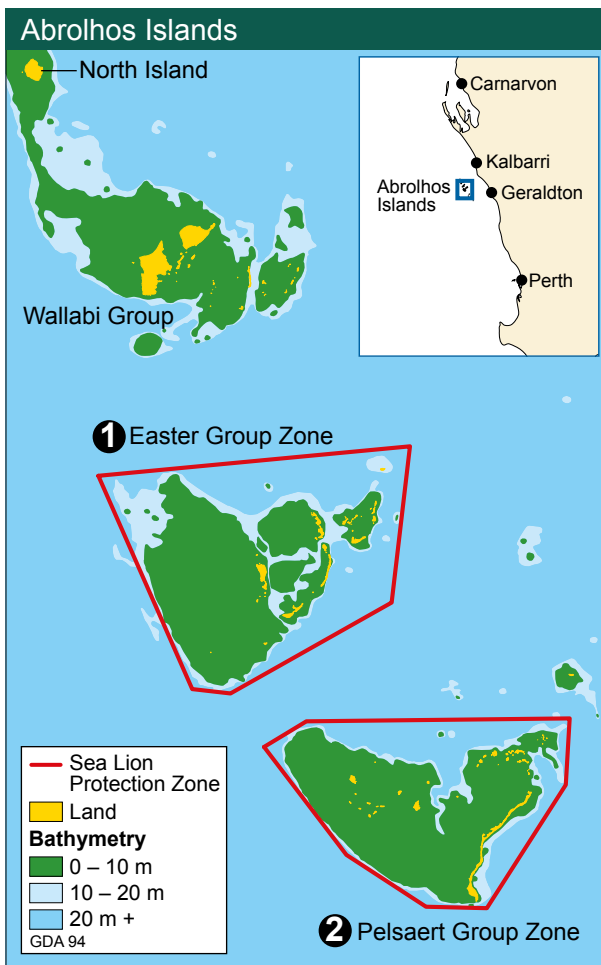
It is the fisher's responsibility to ensure the dog bone or rope coil cannot come undone. Additional securing of the rope coil with cable ties is recommended when using this method. For additional information on how to hang a rope vertically in the water column, visit **recfishwest.org.au**

Sea lion exclusion devices (SLEDs)

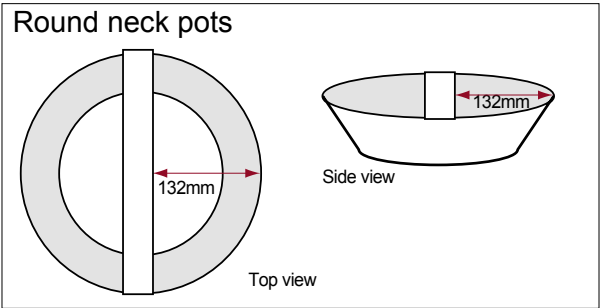
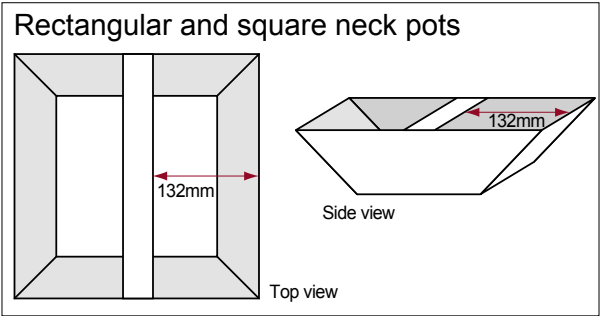
Fishers who use lobster pots between South Rocks (south of Wedge Island) and Freshwater Point, south of Dongara, are required to fit SLEDs to their pots to prevent sea lions being caught.



SLEDs are also mandatory in two areas of the Abrolhos Islands – the Pelsaert and Easter groups of islands.



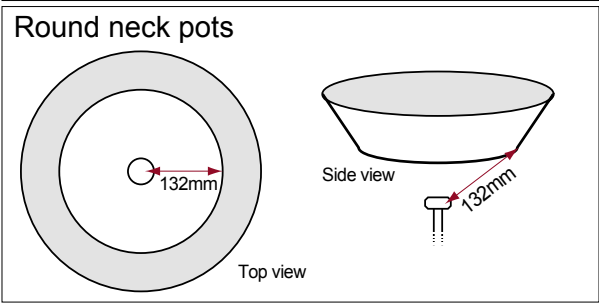
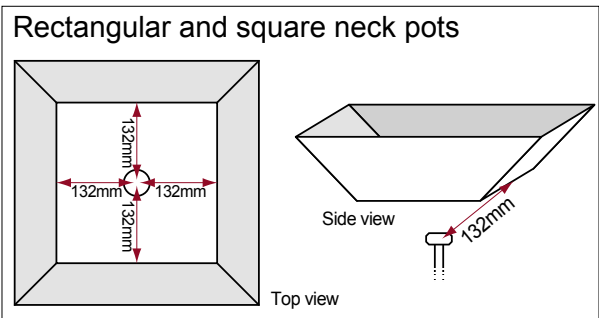
A SLED is fitted by fixing a piece of rigid, nonflexible material across the top of the neck that ensures that the gap from the edge of the external SLED to either side of the top of the neck is no greater than 132mm.



Alternatively a SLED can be fitted by the fixing of a rigid, non-flexible piece of material rising vertically from the base of the pot to a height that ensures the diagonal distance to the neck from the top centre of the internal SLED is no greater than 132mm. The diagonal distance is to be measured to the edge of the neck in any direction in a round neck pot, and to the midpoint of the four sides in a square or rectangular neck pot.

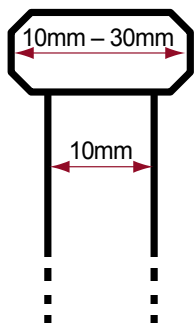


This internal SLED juts vertically from the pot's base so the sea lion can't get in.



Dimensions of internal SLED

The internal SLED must be a minimum of 10mm in diameter and the top of the internal SLED must be a minimum of 10mm and a maximum of 30mm in diameter.



Plastic bait bands

Possessing plastic bait bands at sea is prohibited on all commercial and recreational fishing boats in WA. The bands pose a risk to marine life through entanglement.

Totally protected lobsters

Lobsters are totally protected at some stages in their lifecycle. When lobsters are protected, you may not take them, have them in your possession, buy, sell, or bring them into the State or into WA waters.

You are legally required to immediately return undersize, berried and/or tarspot lobsters to the water from which they were taken, before the next pot is pulled and before you catch another lobster when diving.

Berried females:

Any species of lobster that is carrying eggs (berried) is protected.

Tarspot females:

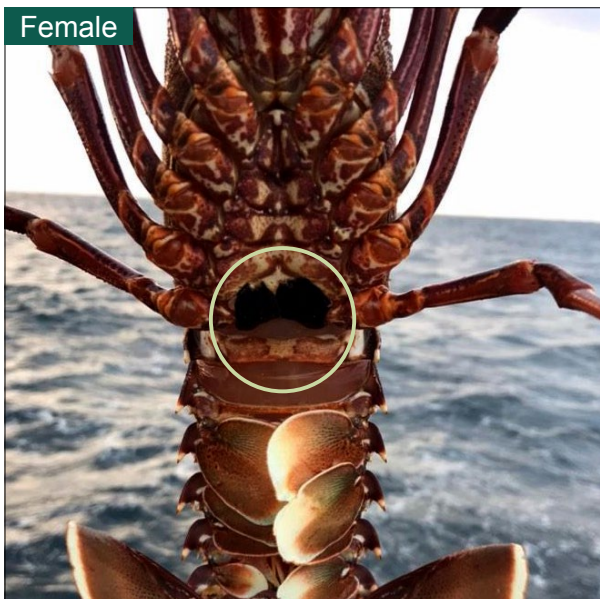
Western rock lobsters in this condition are protected between Windy Harbour and North West Cape. Females shed their shells and begin their breeding cycle in late winter and spring.

Females ready to spawn have a 'tarspot' under the carapace between the back legs. This black spot is a packet of sperm attached during mating. During spawning, the female releases sperm from the tarspot to fertilise the eggs.

Identifying berried and tarspot lobsters



Berried female



Female lobster with tarspot (sperm packet) under carapace between the back legs.

Lobsters you keep

Keep your lobsters whole on board a vessel

Rock lobsters must be kept and stored whole while on a vessel (with head and tail) unless they are being prepared for immediate consumption, or the part of the lobster is not a tail.

However, you can now be in possession of lobster tails on land (see page 5).

Tail clipping

If a lobster is kept, you must clip the central flap on its tail fan, removing at least the bottom half of it, or punch a circular hole of no less than 10mm



in diameter in the central segment of the tail fan within 5 minutes of the lobster being brought to the boat or land where a boat is not used.

This is done to identify it as a recreationally caught lobster, which can't be sold.

In normal circumstances a DPIRD Fisheries and Marine Officer will allow 5 minutes from the time a diver returns to the vessel or from when a pot is pulled before undertaking an inspection.

At the end of your fishing activity you:

- must not have any Totally Protected Fish (for example undersize and/or tarspot etc)
- must not have more than the bag limit or boat limit
- must have tail clipped all retained lobsters.

Catch care guide for lobsters

It is important to care for caught lobsters to increase their chance of survival once returned to the ocean.

Poor handling of lobsters can affect growth of the individual and increase their vulnerability to predation.

Lobsters exposed to air for more than 5 minutes become compromised. When in this state and returned to the water, the individuals descend slowly to the seafloor. This can lead to increased molestation and predation from fish and octopus.

Lobsters also have defined home grounds and removal from their home ground can cause them to become disorientated and more vulnerable to predation.

Lobsters that have damage to their carapace or lost appendages use more energy in regrowing their damaged shell than growing in size, resulting in a longer time to reach legal catch size and reduced reproductive capacity.

Releasing lobster guide

Take care of lobsters to prevent damage including loss of legs.

Do not expose the lobster to excess heat.

Return lobsters to the water within 5 minutes – before moving to the next pot.

Return lobsters to the same area you pulled the pot to ensure they are within their home grounds and not disorientated.

Aim to place them over reef or seaweed to ensure they have a safe refuge to recover.

By doing this, we can increase survivability of lobsters and improve future catches.



Marine conservation areas

Rock lobster fishing is restricted within some marine conservation areas such as State Marine Parks, Commonwealth Marine Parks and Fish Habitat Protection Areas. Some marine conservation areas are shown in the maps on pages 23 and 24.

State and Commonwealth Marine Parks have 'no take' sanctuary zones or National Park Zones that are closed to all fishing. Fishing is also prohibited within certain areas of Fish Habitat Protection Areas.

For specific information on the marine conservation areas and restrictions that may apply to rock lobster fishing please visit the following websites:

State Marine Parks

- The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions website (dbca.wa.gov.au); or
- The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's recreational fishing rules website rules.fish.wa.gov.au

Commonwealth Marine Parks

- Parks Australia website (parksaustralia.gov.au)

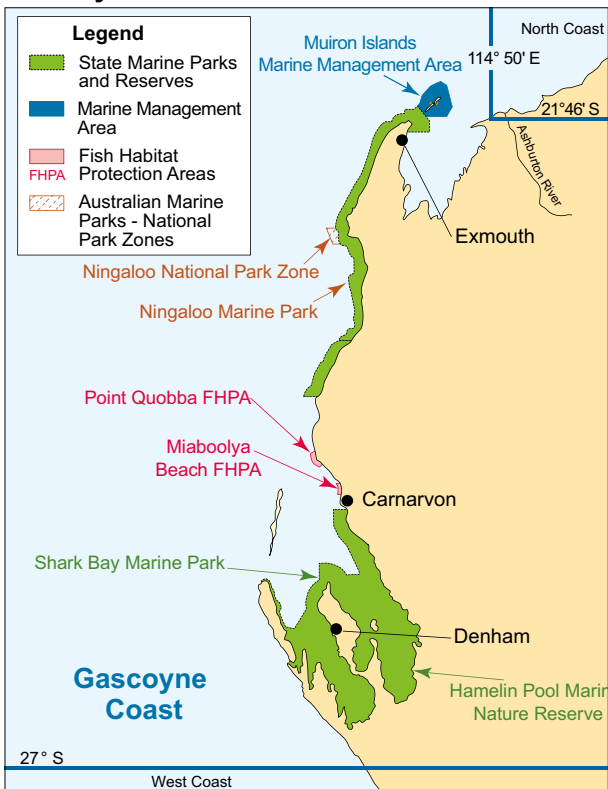
Fish Habitat Protection Areas

- The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's recreational fishing rules website rules.fish.wa.gov.au

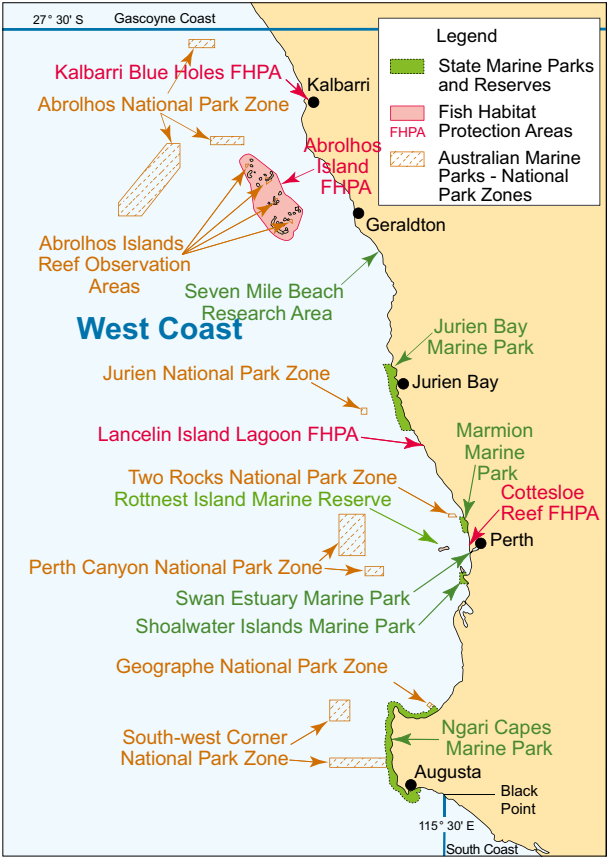
North Coast



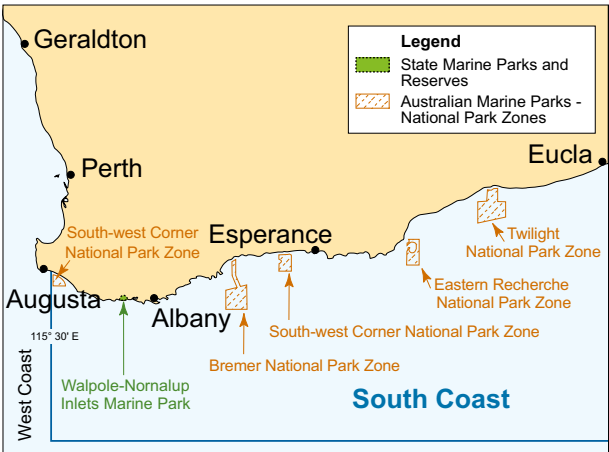
Gascoyne Coast



West Coast



South Coast



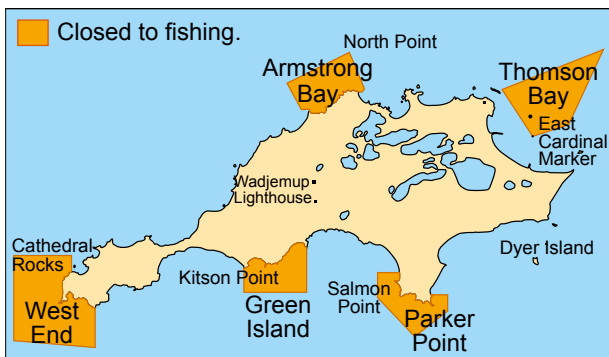
Other rock lobster fishing closures

Point Samson

All reef life is protected. You may use a line or spear for finfish only (except sharks and rays, which are protected).

Rottneest Island

Fishing is prohibited in the five conservation areas – Parker Point, Thomson Bay, Armstrong Bay, Green Island and West End.



Research areas – closed to recreational rock lobster fishing

Jurien Bay Research Area (zone within the Jurien Bay Marine Park)

Lobster fishing is prohibited in the waters between Boullanger Island to Osprey and Whitlock islets.

Seven Mile Beach – Dongara

Lobster fishing is prohibited within the research area.

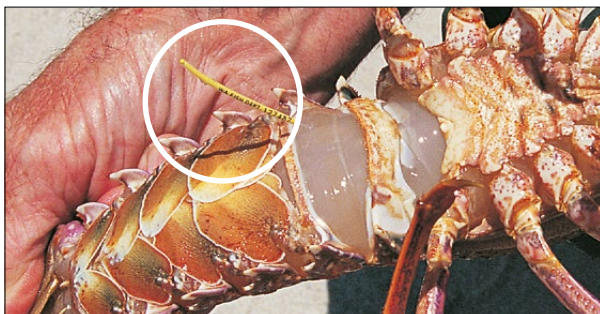
Dive wrecks

All fishing is prohibited within the stated areas at the following wreck sites:

- ***HMAS Perth***: within 250 metres.
- ***HMAS Swan***: within 200 metres.
- ***Kunmunya and Samson II***: within 500 metres.
- ***Lena***: within 400 metres.
- ***Sanko Harvest***: within 500 metres.
- ***Saxon Ranger and South Tomi***: within the defined areas described under 'Year-round closures' on the Fisheries website at fish.wa.gov.au/fishing-and-aquaculture

Return a tag

Scientists use yellow 'spaghetti' tags to collect data about lobster movements, growth rates, abundance and catch rates.



If you catch a tagged lobster, write down the tag number, lobster size (carapace length), sex, date, location (GPS co-ordinates if possible) and depth at which it was caught. Also record whether it was carrying eggs or had a tarspot and whether it was kept or released.

If the lobster is legal to take, you may keep it. If it is not legal to take (undersize or berried) return it to the water with the tag still attached.

Report tagged lobsters to Ben Hebiton on **(08) 9203 0111** or email **lobster.tag@dpird.wa.gov.au**. iPhone users can submit the information using our free FISHTAGWA app.

Marine fauna sightings app



The Marine Fauna Sightings app is designed to allow all water users to digitally submit their sightings of whales and other marine fauna off the Western Australian coast.

Despite their iconic status, there is little known about the movement patterns of many of these species. Your sightings, combined with sightings from other users, will give us a much better understanding of where and when different species move along our coast, and their behaviour patterns here.

The app also contains a survey function. Surveys are an extremely valuable data set and very easy to do. Simply start a survey when you are travelling to a destination (e.g. returning to port) and then record any species (e.g. humpback whales) that you see on your journey. When you arrive at your destination just end the survey and this data will be recorded. While it is important to know where species are seen, it is equally valuable to know areas where they are less commonly seen. This information will greatly assist us in protecting these important species that frequent and migrate through our coastal waters, and it will also help DPIRD to provide better management information to the fishing industry.

The app is free to download and is available for both iPhone and Android users.

About this guide

This publication is to provide assistance or information. It is only a guide and does not replace the *Fish Resources Management Act 1994* or the *Fish Resources Management Regulations 1995*. It cannot be used as a defence in a court of law. The information provided is current at the date of printing but may be subject to change. For the most up-to-date information on fishing and full details of legislation contact your local DPIRD office or visit **fish.wa.gov.au/about-us/legislation**

Please note that **penalties apply** for fishing offences. All fishing may be subject to surveillance by DPIRD Fisheries and Marine Officers.

Taking undersize rock lobster or having more than your possession limit can attract fines as high as \$5,000 for an individual plus up to 10 times the prescribed value of the species.

Interfering with another person's fishing gear or catch, selling recreationally caught fish and other similar offences can result in penalties of up to \$400,000, imprisonment for four years and loss of boats, vehicles and equipment. Offenders may also lose the privilege of engaging in a licensed fishing activity.

If you see or hear of illegal fishing activity, call FishWatch on 1800 815 507 or online at **crimestopperswa.com.au/organisation-report/fishwatch/**

Report shark sightings
to Water Police on

9442 8600

Download the
SharkSmart WA app

SWITCH
ON YOUR
SEA SENSE 

SHARKSMART.COM.AU

Recfishwest

Love your fishing? So do we!

As the peak body for rec fishing, our purpose is to ensure great fishing experiences for all in the WA community forever.

Visit our website to find out about some great fishing initiatives.



recfishwest.org.au

Hook up to the rec fishing rules

It's easy to keep up to date with Western Australia's recreational fishing rules. Whether it's for bag and size limits, seasonal closures or licences, all the rules are at your fingertips.



Go to **fish.wa.gov.au/rules** for rules covering more than 180 fish species. Use the interactive maps to discover information about marine protected areas and common species by region.



The free Recfishwest app provides access to the rules even if you're out of phone range and has an easy fish identification feature.



Grab a copy or download from **fish.wa.gov.au/guide**



Contact us

1300 374 731 (1300 DPIRD1)

enquiries@dpird.wa.gov.au

Albany Office

444 Albany Highway,
Albany WA 6330
(08) 9845 7400

Broome Office

401 Port Drive,
Broome WA 6725
(08) 9193 8600

Busselton Office

48A Bussell Highway,
Busselton WA 6280
(08) 9752 2152

Carnarvon Office

262 South River Road,
Carnarvon WA 6701
(08) 9956 3333

Fremantle Office

14 Capo D'Orlando Drive,
South Fremantle WA
6162
(08) 9432 8000

Geraldton Office

20 Gregory Street,
Geraldton WA 6530
(08) 9956 8555

Hillarys Office

39 Northside Drive,
Hillarys WA 6025
(08) 9203 0111

dpird.wa.gov.au

ABN: 18 951 343 745

FISHWATCH



REPORT
▶ Illegal fishing
▶ Pests and diseases
▶ Fish kills

1800-815-507
24 HOUR REPORTING



Scan to
report online