

The fisheries authorities in Mexico are having difficulty in maintaining the resource at its optimum levels of production. This is mainly caused by consumer preferences of both the domestic and international markets for smaller size lobsters. This situation conflicts with the regulatory criteria, especially in the lobster fishery along Mexico's Caribbean coastline. The preferred sizes are precisely those which have not yet reached the legal minimum stage of development. Sustained harvest in that area is seriously inhibited since individuals of those smaller sizes do not get to reproduce even once in their lifetime.

The number of fishermen dedicated to the lobster fishery in the Caribbean has increased disproportionately, but not so the reproduction of the lobster resource. This has serious implications for maintaining the future balance, as the indiscriminate catching of lobsters by fishermen who use modern aqualung diving techniques, tends to deplete the numbers of female lobsters before they can reproduce. The exclusive use of lobster traps could resolve this problem, but no regulation has yet been introduced regarding the equipment and/or fishing systems that are appropriate and approved for the catching of lobster.

### SUPPLY AND CONSUMPTION

The disposable volume of lobster in the domestic market in 1991 reached over 1,683 tonnes. This was an increase of 98.7%, compared to a decline of 2.7% the previous year. Per Capita consumption of lobster went from 11.13 kilograms in 1989 to 20.33 kilograms in 1991. Direct human consumption of lobster in 1991 is estimated at approximately 10.10 kilograms, while indirect human consumption reached 10.23 kilograms.

Lobster is distributed in the Mexican consumer market whole-boiled-frozen (67%), fresh-frozen tails (28%) and as lobster pulp (5%). Lobster is a high-priced food item, which is affordable and consumed regularly only by the upper middle class and the wealthy sectors of the population.

Of late, imported surimi products (imitation crab and lobster made from inexpensive white fish) have entered the market. They are sold over supermarket fish counters, fish stores and served mostly at Japanese restaurants. Being a new and cheaper product (the price of imported surimi is but a fraction of that for real lobster), Mexican housewives tend to be willing to try surimi for a time, but the novelty soon wears off. On the other hand, surimi consumption in specialty restaurants is on the increase, but this trend represents no serious threat to the traditional consumption of real product.