

## NORTH AMERICA

### MEXICO

Mexico ranked 9<sup>th</sup> among the world's lobster-producing nations in 1992, and species of the Palinuridae, Nephropidae and Scyllaridae families of spiny lobster may be found in Mexican waters. Of the seven Palinuridae species present in Mexican waters, only four make up the lobster fishery: red lobster {*Panulirus interruptus*}, green lobster {*P. gracilis*}, blue lobster {*P. inflatus*}, and Caribbean lobster {*P. argus*}. Total lobster landings in Mexico were 2,000 metric tonnes in 1992, down from 2,300 metric tonnes in 1991 and 1990. Most of the lobsters are taken along the Peninsula of Baja California (from Ensenada to Bahía de Magdalena, Isla La Partida and Isla Espíritu Santo), and the Peninsula of Yucatán (Punta Holchit and the coastline of Quintana Roo). Potential exists to develop the lobster fishery along the coasts of Qaxaca and Chiapas, however, studies are required to determine the exact potential of the resource and the number of fishermen that will be allowed to exploit the resource.

The lobster fishery in Mexico is reserved to co-operatives. There are 90 fisheries co-operatives with a total membership of approximately 10,500 fishermen, however, not all of them are directly involved in the lobster harvest. In order to manage and preserve the lobster resource, the Secretariat of Fisheries via its National Fisheries Institute, has taken two regulatory measures (besides limiting the number of fishermen): a period each year when the harvesting of lobster is prohibited; and a minimum size that can legally be taken depending on the characteristics of each of the species being exploited. These measures are to allow more larva to be released by the female lobsters at spawning time, to give the resource a period of rest, and to enable it to develop in size. The objective is to allow female lobsters to reach maturity and breed at least once in their lifetime, therefore providing replacements for the females which are caught. The prohibition period and minimum sizes allowed for each specie are as follows.

<i>Lobster Species</i>	<i>Prohibition Period</i>	<i>Minimum Size</i>
Red lobster	16 March–30 September	82.5 cephalothorax
Green/Blue lobster	1 June–15 September	82.5 cephalothorax
Caribbean lobster	1 March–30 June	14.5 abdominal

Disposable volume of lobster in the domestic market in 1991 reached over 1,683 tonnes, an increase of 98.7 percent, compared to a decline of 2.7 percent in 1990. Per capita consumption of lobster was 11.13kg in 1989, increasing to 20.33 in 1991. Direct human consumption of lobster in 1991 was estimated at 10.1kg per capita, while indirect reached 10.23kg. Lobster is distributed in the Mexican consumer market whole-boiled-frozen (67 percent), fresh-frozen tails (28 percent) and as lobster pulp (5 percent). 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.

### *Mexican Lobster Consumption* {Kilograms}

<i>Year</i>	<i>Production</i>	<i>Imports</i>	<i>Exports</i>	<i>Apparent</i>	<i>Per Capita</i>
1989	1,842,000	9,150	980,431	870,719	11.13
1990	1,887,000	16,254	1,056,384	846,870	10.44
1991	2,621,000	1,435	939,399	1,683,036	20.33

Source: *Secretaría de Pesca, Secretaría de Comercio y Fomento Industrial*

Imported surimi products (imitation crab and lobster made from inexpensive white fish) have entered the Mexican consumer market, and are sold at supermarket fish counters, specialty fish stores, and served at Japanese restaurants. A new and cheaper product (the price of imported surimi is a fraction of 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 represents no serious threat to the traditional consumption of real lobster products. The new La Viga fish market in metropolitan Mexico City is the largest and most modern in Latin America, and is the major distribution centre for all fisheries products, including lobster and crayfish.