



Spiny Lobster Fishery Country Profile

Belize

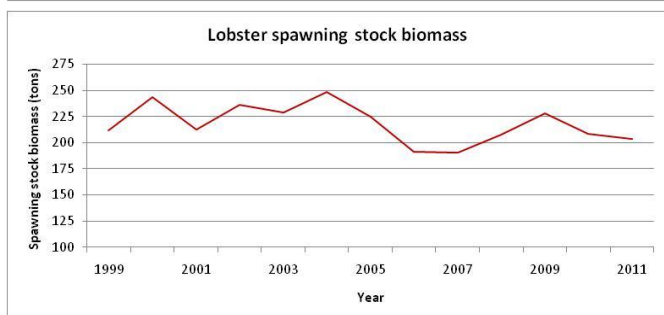
Overview of the Fishery

- The spiny lobster fishery is the most important small-scale fishery in Belize.
- It is a seasonal fishery, kept as “open access” from June 15 - February 14 every year.
- The lobster fishery (as an economic activity) started in the country in the mid to late 1950s. Catches increased rapidly, and peaked in 1981 (with 1021 tons of live weight). Since then there has been a decline in catches, but fishing effort has continued to increase.
- Free diving using hook sticks and wooden traps are the most common gear for harvesting lobster (>90% of extraction). Other gear used includes “shades”, drums, tires and casitas.



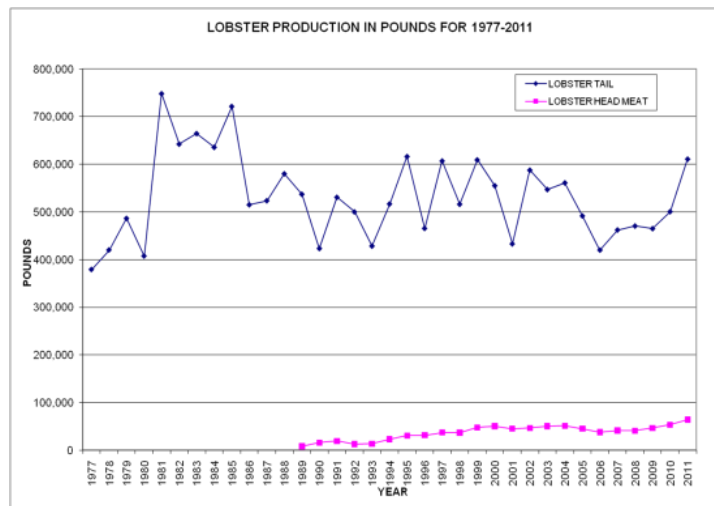
Management Objectives and Regulations

- Management objectives for the Belizean spiny lobster fishery include:
 - Ensure catch does not exceed sustainable levels.
 - Prohibit destructive fishing practices
 - Improve management through national and international collaborations.
- In Belize, regulations specific to the spiny lobster fishery (according to the Fisheries Act) include:
 - Minimum size limits (carapace length >3 inches; tail weight >4 oz);
 - Prohibition on taking berried individuals;
 - Closed season between February 15th - June 14th;
 - Prohibition on landing moulted (soft) lobster tails;
 - Prohibition on use of SCUBA or explosives;
 - Prohibition on lobster fishing in conservation and preservation zones within marine reserves and the national parks



Economic and Social Importance

- Belize’s fishing industry is ranked 5th in the national economy. The lobster fishery is the most important and lucrative fishery of this industry.
- In 2011, some 557,320 lbs of lobster meat was exported, which earned \$16.85 million.
- Presently there are about 2,582 fishermen in Belize. It is noted that the number of licensed fishermen has continued to rise over the last few years.
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Fisher Cooperatives

- Lobster tail and head meat produced by fishers are sold to the two main fishing cooperatives (Northern Fishermen Cooperative Soc. Ltd. and the National Fishermen Producers Cooperative Soc. Ltd.) both of which are based in Belize City. These cooperative sell locally and process and export lobster products.
- Another fishing cooperative (Placencia Fishermen Cooperative) sell fishery products locally or export through one of the aforementioned cooperatives.

Resource Status

- The lobster fishery is considered fully “mature” with production volume ranging between 400 – 600 thousand pounds in the last 25 years.
- Harvested lobsters are between the ages of 1 and 3 years with 2-year lobster contributing to >70% of catch landings.
- As shown in the graphs above lobster recruitment and spawning stock have remained fairly stable in the last few years.



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