

## Commercial Spiny Lobster Fishing in the Gulf of Mexico States

Spiny lobsters are also known as Crawfish, Rock lobster, Bug, Florida lobster, and *Langosta espinosa* (Figure 1). Spiny lobsters are managed jointly by the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, and the area of management is from the Mexico/Texas border to the North Carolina/Virginia border. According to the 2010 stock assessment, the population status of the South Atlantic/Gulf of Mexico spiny lobster stock is unknown due to too much uncertainty in the data, but the stock is not subject to overfishing based on 2016 catch data.



Figure 1. Caribbean Spiny Lobster (*Panulirus argus*). Also known as Crawfish, Rock lobster, Bug, Florida lobster, and *Langosta espinosa*. Source: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/caribbean-spiny-lobster>.

Spiny lobsters lack the front claws of the American lobster and are harvested for their tail meat. They are available fresh from August through March (Figure 2). According to a recent Biological Opinion of the spiny lobster fishery, the trap fishing activities associated with this fishery can be harmful to other animals like sea turtles, sawfish, and corals. The biological assessment led to a 2012 amendment by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, which created new closed areas to reduce impacts from lobster traps.

Spiny lobsters live in shallow water to depths of 295 feet in bays, estuarine areas, coral reefs, and other offshore habitats. During seasonal migrations, they can be found on soft-bottom habitats and seagrass beds as they move along shore and offshore to escape cold water. Spiny lobsters can live to ages of 15 years or more and can grow up to 15 pounds or 18 inches. It takes them two years to grow to the 3-inch carapace legal harvesting size. Spiny lobsters are nocturnal, preying on snails, crabs, and clams. Spiny lobsters are preyed upon by groupers, snappers, sharks, skates, turtles, and octopuses.

References:

1. FishWatch. June 11, 2018. <https://www.fishwatch.gov/profiles/caribbean-spiny-lobster>.
2. Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. June 11, 2018. <http://gulfcouncil.org/fishery-management/implemented-plans/spiny-lobster/>.
3. NOAA Fisheries - Southeast Regional Office. June 11, 2018. [http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable\\_fisheries/gulf\\_sa/spiny\\_lobster/index.html](http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_sa/spiny_lobster/index.html).

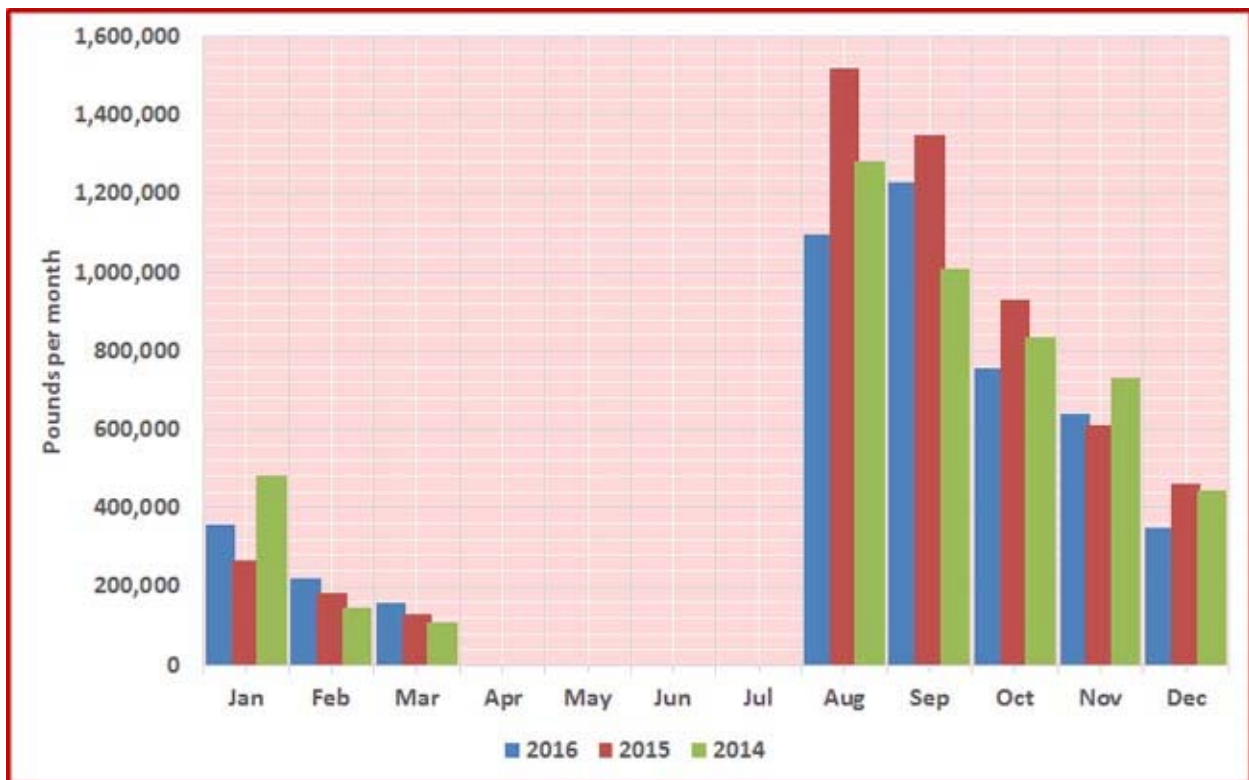


Figure 2. Monthly distribution of commercial spiny lobster landings in the Gulf of Mexico Region. Source of raw data: NOAA Fisheries (<http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/>).

## Recipe

Key West Pink Shrimp and Florida Spiny Lobster Tails served with Hot Key Lime Butter



Figure 3. This recipe is courtesy of [Allrecipes](https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/219982/key-west-pink-shrimp-and-florida-spiny-lobster-tails-served-with-hot-key-lime-butter/). For ingredients and cooking instructions, please visit their website at <https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/219982/key-west-pink-shrimp-and-florida-spiny-lobster-tails-served-with-hot-key-lime-butter/>.

## Commercial Landings

The long-term annual commercial spiny lobster landings in the Gulf of Mexico Region are shown in Figure 4. Since 2011, the Gulf States supplied 97% of the entire spiny lobster domestic landings averaging 4.9 million pounds and valued at \$40 million annually.

Florida West Coast is the largest producing state in the Gulf of Mexico region, supplying 91% of all domestically-caught spiny lobster and all of the landings in the Gulf of Mexico region. The Florida East Coast provided most of the remaining balance of the total domestic landings of spiny lobster.

## MarketMaker Businesses

In 2016, the Gulf-wide commercial landings of spiny lobster reached 4.8 million pounds. Spiny lobsters are harvested from August to March (Figure 2). More than 50 businesses which harvest, process, and sell lobsters are registered in MarketMaker nationwide.

To search for lobster businesses, perform the following procedures:

1. Go to <http://ms.foodmarketmaker.com>
2. Click “search” and type “lobster” in the search box.

You can sort the search results by relevance and name. You can also limit online searches by state, county, city or number of miles from a specified location, and type of business.

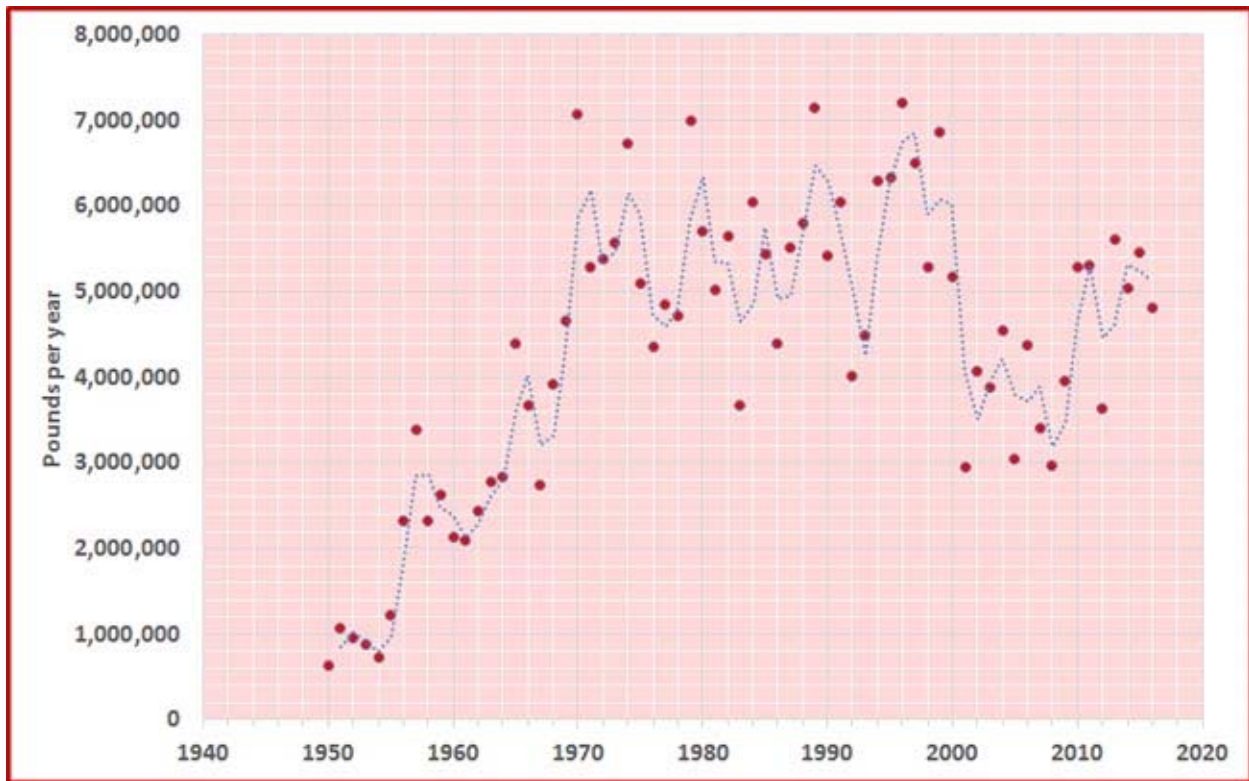


Figure 4. Annual commercial spiny lobster landings in the Gulf of Mexico Region. Source of raw data: NOAA Fisheries (<http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/>).

### Economic Contributions

The economic contribution an industry makes locally, region-wide, nation-wide, or globally is crucial information in making private investment decisions, formulating government policy, and developing research and extension programs for the industry. The IMPLAN (<http://implan.com/>) software and the 2013 input-output data for the five Gulf States were used to estimate the economic contribution of commercial fishing to the Gulf of Mexico regional economy in 2016. The economic analysis used sector 17 or commercial fishing of the 2013 IMPLAN input-output data.

The annual commercial dockside values of spiny lobster in the Gulf of Mexico Region in 2016 reached \$39.4 million, which was 2% less than the average yearly dockside values in the region since 2011. The total output contribution of commercial spiny lobster fishing in 2016 amounted to \$75.1 million (Figure 5). The spiny lobster commercial fishing sustained 1,043 jobs and generated labor income amounting to \$26.9 million in the Gulf regional economy.

The spiny lobster commercial fishing industry generates annual tax revenues for the Gulf States and the U.S. federal government. About \$4.6 million was estimated to have been paid by households and businesses in 2016 to the federal government as social insurance tax, tax on production and imports, corporate profit tax, and personal income

tax. The Gulf States were expected to have collected taxes from households and businesses in 2016 amounting to \$2.25 million as social insurance tax, tax on production and imports, corporate profits tax, and personal tax.

<b>Economic contribution of commercial spiny lobster fishing in the Gulf of Mexico States</b>				
Impact Type	Employment (Jobs)	Labor Income (\$M)	Total Value Added (\$M)	Output (\$M)
Direct Effect	850	16.6	20.4	39.4
Indirect Effect	63	4.2	8.1	17.4
Induced Effect	130	6.2	11.2	18.4
<b>Total Effect</b>	<b>1,043</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>39.7</b>	<b>75.1</b>

Figure 5. The total economic contribution includes direct, indirect and induced effects estimated by using 2016 annual landing values and 2013 IMPLAN data. The local purchases percentage was set at 100%. The number of jobs is rounded off.

When Hurricane Irma struck Florida in Sept. 2017, the spiny lobster fishing industry was extensively devastated. The more than 350,000 spiny lobster traps were either destroyed or displaced. Also, fishing boats and equipment, docks, fish houses, and other facilities suffered the destructive forces of the hurricane. The hurricane hit during the very peak of the spiny lobster season. The economic devastation of this natural disaster is massive, and the sector hardest hit are the coastal communities engaged in commercial fishing.

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