



Ask the lobster doc

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This column provides lobster health and handling information.

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Achieving a healthy size/age structure

The last three Lobster Doc columns (see CFN March, April, and May 2004) have been about how lobster size is related to reproduction. To summarize briefly, size matters because:

- Size is related to the number of eggs, sperm, and consequently offspring produced;
- Lobsters need to find mates of similar size to successfully reproduce;
- Large and small lobsters use different reproductive strategies;
- Migratory movements differ according to body size: large females travel greater distances than small females while they are carrying their eggs; and
- Either small or large lobsters alone can't contribute the same quality, quantity, and distribution of offspring to the next generation as both large and small lobsters can produce together.

Maintaining an appropriate mix of lobster sizes may be the key to achieving

long-term sustainability of the lobster resource.

The questions that remain are:

- Is there a healthy size structure throughout the lobster's range?
- If not, how can it be restored where it has been lost? And
- If so, how can it be maintained where it is healthy?

Limits on the size of individual lobsters being harvested have undoubtedly helped to sustain the fishery. Many lobsters are guarded against being harvested before reaching sexual maturity and therefore have had an opportunity to reproduce. Others are protected when they reach a maximum legal size.

The purpose of this discussion has been to provide information about lobster reproduction and the size structure of a population. There has been no intent to endorse or recommend management measures. ■