

INFORMATION SHEET



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What is the difference between lobsters and crayfish?

Lobsters and crayfish are decapod Crustacea

Lobsters and crayfish are similar crustaceans. They are usually aquatic animals with a hard skin (an exoskeleton) over a segmented body. The Decapoda, the group of Crustacea to which all lobsters and crayfish (and prawns, shrimps and crabs) belong, have five pairs of legs on the main part of the body, plus five pairs of swimmerets on the abdomen or tail. It is the muscular tail, and sometimes the legs and claws, that are edible.

All lobsters and crayfish produce eggs, which are carried by the adult female attached to the swimmerets under the tail. (In Australia, catching or selling females in this condition is generally not allowed.) When the eggs hatch, the young swim out to sea, where they spend up to a year before returning to settle near the coast.

Different kinds of lobsters and crayfish

The classification of the Decapoda is very complex, even to a carcinologist (a scientist who studies Crustacea). The words 'lobster' and 'crayfish' are used in various combinations to describe many different decapods.

Lobsters

The only 'true' lobsters are marine and have a pair of enormous edible flat claws. There are two very similar species: the European Lobster, found on the Atlantic coast of Europe and Scandinavia and in the Mediterranean, and the American Lobster, found on the Atlantic coast of North America. The claws are the first of the five pairs of legs; the second and third pairs end in small pincers. True lobsters are not sold in Australia.

Rock lobsters and spiny lobsters

The most familiar large marine crustaceans in Australia are called rock lobsters, but are better known as spiny lobsters in the rest of the world. The older traditional names, crayfish or cray, are still often used but invite confusion with freshwater crayfish, which are quite different. Unlike the European or American Lobsters, spiny lobsters do not have large claws; the first pair of legs are only slightly fatter than the other four pairs.



Western Rock Lobster
Copyright C Bryce

In Australia two species are commercially very valuable. The Southern Rock Lobster is caught in south-eastern Australia, where it is sold fresh, frozen or live in restaurants. In southern Western Australia the Western Rock Lobster is caught in large numbers. Dozens of other species of spiny lobsters are fished in other parts of the world.

Crayfish

Crayfish are freshwater crustaceans that inhabit rivers, lakes or dams. There are no marine crayfish – in spite of the colloquial use this name for the spiny lobsters. Freshwater crayfish

have a pair of large claws, two pairs of legs ending in pincers, and two other pairs of simple walking legs.

The most familiar crayfish to Australians is the Yabby, caught in dams on a bait of smelly meat. Yabbies are reared on commercial farms for restaurants. A much larger species is the Murray Crayfish, also called the Spiny Cray.

The equivalent animal in the USA is the Crawfish, most famous in southern states like Louisiana.



Yabby
Copyright E Tsrylin

Bugs

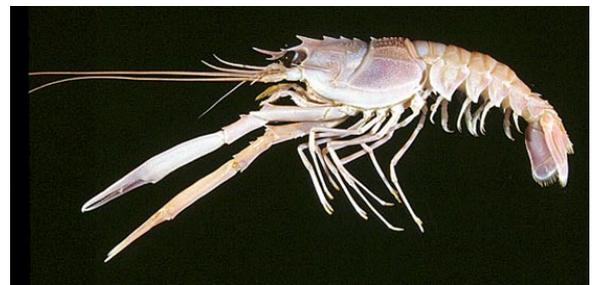
What the rest of the world call slipper lobsters, Australians call bugs. Two sorts of slipper lobsters are sold in Australia. Both look like flattened lobsters without the claws. The feelers (antennae), instead of being thin and whip-like, are plate-like attachments in front of the eyes. The Balmain Bug from southern Australia has eyes near the middle of the body, and the Moreton Bay Bug from northern Australia has eyes at the side.



Balmain Bug
Copyright R Blackwood

Scampi

Scampi, also known as Norwegian Lobsters or Dublin Bay Prawns, are relatively abundant in Europe, but the Australian species are relatively rare and expensive. Scampi have long thin claws and two pairs of legs with pincers. There is a deep-water Scampi fishery in north-western Australia, but most Scampi in fish shops in Australia come from New Zealand.



Scampi
Copyright CSIRO

Further reading

Fallu, R, 1994. *Yabbies for Fun, Fishing and Farming*. Department of Food and Agriculture: Melbourne.

Holthuis, L B, 1991. *Marine Lobsters of the World. An Annotated and Illustrated Catalogue of Species of Interest to Fisheries Known to Date*. FAO Species Catalogue, Volume 13.

Food and Agriculture Organization: Rome. Kailola, P J, Williams, M J, Stewart, P C, Reichelt, R E, McNee, A and Grieve, C., 1993. *Australian fisheries resources*. Bureau of Resource Sciences, Department of Primary Industries and Energy, and Fisheries Research and Development Corporation: Canberra. Museum Victoria 2000. *What is the difference between prawns and shrimps?* Information Sheet 10295.

Yearsley, G K, Last, P R and Ward, R D 1999. *Australian Seafood Handbook. An Identification Guide to Domestic Species*. CSIRO Marine Research: Hobart.

Internet resources

Crustaceans of southern Australia:
<http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/crust/>