

## Quality Reference Guide

Grading at intake is an important tool in your arsenal for ensuring you get immediate feedback on any issues that might result in downgrading and loss of value, allowing you to make changes and stem any losses. The benefit of this approach is clear in the results, with 99.2% of all lobsters received in the 2016/2017 season consigned in premium condition.

For the 2018/2019 season, here are the quality standards for premium lobsters:

A premium grade lobster is one that has:

- At least one feeler reaching to at least the back of the head (or carapace) (Fig. 1)
- Not more than 2 legs missing on either or both sides (Fig. 2)
- No cracks or other damage/defects to the shell (Fig. 3)
- No significant fan tail damage
- No swelling between the carapace and the tail (the "neck" )
- No other defects that graders deem unsuitable for premium grade

and is:

- Strong, vigorous and likely to survive international live export, etc.
- Not obviously soft following a moult

Note that while some of the criteria, such as leg loss, are very straightforward to use, others – such as vigour or shell hardness – are more difficult to define.

## Soft Shell Lobsters

Any soft shell lobsters consigned will be downgraded to second grade at intake. Even though they may look strong when consigned, our customers clearly tell us that soft shell lobsters do not perform well during and following live export. This problem has been recognized in other species too. The Australian Southern Rocklobster fisheries even tried (unsuccessfully) to make a tool to measure the hardness of lobsters on the boats, so soft lobsters could be returned to the water. It's difficult to give absolute rules on what a soft shell lobster is, so your guiding principle should be if a lobster is "noticeably soft" then reject it. You and your crew handle thousands of lobsters each season and are perfectly qualified to make this assessment. GFC's grading staff check hardness by gently squeezing the sides of the head between thumb and forefinger in the area where the whiteline runs the length of the head (Fig. 4). If the shell moves inwards easily, the lobster is classed as soft shell and is downgraded.

## Totally Protected Fish (TPF)

Totally Protected Fish (TPF) include breeding females (setose, tarspot and berried) and undersized lobsters. No person or company is permitted by law to be in possession of TPF. The weight of any TPF found at grading will be deducted from the catch (i.e. have zero value) and the animals released back to the ocean. Remember that the rules around what is a TPF change throughout the year, so be sure to check the Department of Fisheries regulations.

The following table is a guide to the carapace lengths that correspond to the grade weight ranges we use in the factories. You'll see that the size ranges for male and females are slightly different. This is because the head shape of the males changes as they grow and mature. The GFC Marine Store sells purpose-made gauges that give you these size ranges in a single easy to use tool. Note these sizes are a guide only. There is still quite a bit of variation at each cut off point, so if you definitely want to avoid a particular grade, you may need to add 1-2 mm to the cut off limits.

As always, you're welcome to come and watch your catch being graded in the lives factories and to discuss the results with the site managers: Vince Vimini at Sultan Way, mob: 0439 219 776 or Mark Johnson at Geraldton Lives, mob: 0408 902 533.



Figure 4: Lobsters that can be easily compressed at the white lateral line using only a thumb and forefinger will be downgraded to second grade.

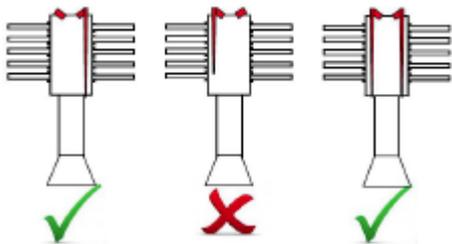


Figure 1: At least one feeler must reach at least to the back of the carapace to qualify for premium grade.

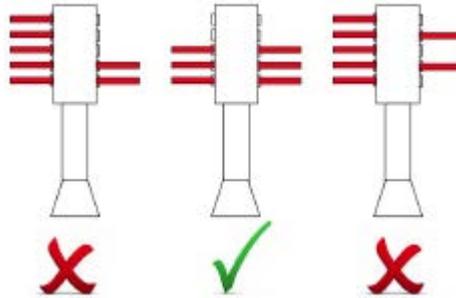


Figure 2: Premium lobsters can have a maximum of two legs missing on one or both sides (i.e. a maximum of 2 + 2 missing).



Figure 3: Lobsters with cracked or bruised shells, or severely damaged tails will be downgraded to second grade.

Grade	Weight (g)	Carapace Length (mm)		
		Females	Males	Average
AA	<420	<77	<78	<77
A	421-490	77-81	78-82	77-81
B	491-610	82-87	83-89	82-88
C	611-740	88-93	90-95	89-94
D	741-850	94-97	96-99	95-98
E	851-970	98-102	100-104	99-103
F	971-1220	103-110	105-112	104-111
G	1221-1800	-	113-128	113-128
H	1801+	-	129+	129+