



A Day in the Life of a Clean Green Rock Lobster Fisher

It is recommended that Facts Sheets 1 and 2 be read prior to reading Fact 3 as it will make the reader familiar with the industry background and some terminology used in this document.

The Clean Green program demonstrates the competence of people working in the industry as having been trained to meet World's best practice standards. Establishing standards from 'pot-to-plate' Clean Green has mainly focused on the catching sector addressing five key criteria:

- 1) On-Board Workplace health and Safety (WH&S) - Specific to the risks of rock lobster fishing operations.
- 2) Animal Welfare – This is important in itself and also important from an economic perspective since live and healthy rock lobsters achieve a premium price.
- 3) Environmental Management - Negating and managing any potential impacts of fishing operations on the marine environment, including Threatened, Endangered and Protected species (TEPS).
- 4) Food Safety & Quality – Ensuring a live, healthy product across the supply chain.
- 5) Sustainable Management - Ensuring the wild rock lobster stocks are managed for long term sustainability including ongoing compliance with the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*.

To become a certified Clean Green fisherman a comprehensive training program is undertaken and upon completion the skipper prepares a management system specific for the vessel that addresses the first four Clean Green program criteria. The fifth Clean Green program criterion is the responsibility of Government management agencies who work with the fishing industry to achieve sustainable wild rock lobster stocks.

Once the management system is finalised the skipper and his vessel undergo a stringent audit by an independent 3rd party who assesses and approves certification and the skipper's and the vessel's ongoing participation in the Clean Green program. Once approved there are ongoing regular repeat audit requirements.



Image 1

The Clean Green program demonstrates the competence of people working in the industry as having been trained to meet World's best practice standards.

The following outlines what constitutes a typical day's work for a Clean Green fisher using actual examples from the fishing vessel *Juggernaut* (**see image 1**), skippered by Anthony Roach and operating out of Beachport in South Australia's Southern Zone Rock Lobster Fishery.

Weather permitting a Rock Lobster fisher (lets refer to him as the skipper and the deckhand as the deckie) can fish seven-days a week until their quota is caught and of course not during any seasonal closures that may apply.

Preparation for a day's fishing usually starts late on the previous day when the bait to be used in the lobster pots is taken from the freezer, unpacked and placed in plastic bins to thaw. The most frequently used bait is barracouta heads where the rest of the body has been processed for human consumption. Other species such as Carp, New Zealand Salmon or Australian Bony Bream which are in sustainable supply and not desired as human fare are also used. A key requirement of the Clean Green program in that bait is sourced from a sustainable supply and packaging material (cardboard) is not being inappropriately discarded instead it is collected and disposed of through the local recycling program.

A Day in the Life of a Clean Green Rock Lobster Fisher



The next day around 3.30am after an early breakfast the skipper Loads the bait onto the vessel from his tender dinghy. *Juggernaut*, a 50 feet purpose built vessel for lobster fishing, is powered by a V-10 820 HP MAN diesel motor. It has ample cabin space that houses a great deal of modern technology that includes GPS plotters for tracking where the lobster pots (the trap-type gear used to commercially fish for lobster) are set and sounders for measuring depth and indicating the type of ocean bottom to identify suitable fishing grounds for setting the pots (see **image 2**). *Juggernaut* has a huge open deck for stowing lobster pots, bait crates, bins for live lobsters and the winch and pot tipper required for retrieving and setting the lobster pots.



Image 2

Steaming out to the fishing grounds can take up to a couple of hours and during this travel time the deckie cuts up the bait. A personal flotation device (self-inflating PFD) and wet weather gear is also donned by the skipper and the deckie to ensure they remain dry and safe which is important when both are busy undertaking what is very physical work. They also apply lots of sunscreen.

The plotter directs the vessel towards where the pots have been set which can be visually located when getting close by the specially marked head gear (buoys) floating on the surface which is marked to assist in identifying the vessel it belongs to. Modern vessels such as *Juggernaut* have a wheel and controls on the outside of the cabin to operate the vessel during the retrieving and setting of the pots which allows the skipper and the deckie to communicate and work effectively as a team (see **image 3**).

Arriving at the first set of head gear the deckie will grapple the rope attached to the buoys with a long pole and vessel hook and pull them on board ensuring the buoys are put aside so as not to become entangled in the rest of the rope that is attached to the pot. Once there is several metres of rope on board it is looped through the winch being operated by the skipper who can control the speed at which the pots are hauled up. The pot is hauled up to the pot tipper which is positioned so it tilts over the side

of the vessel. With the use of foot controls (also a safety mechanism) the pot, still on the pot tipper, is then brought from the side of the vessel onto the deck and positioned to tilt downwards and at a suitable working height above the deck also keeping it stable on an often heaving deck (see **image 4**).

The pots can be set over a considerable distance which can be many kilometres from first to last.

Once the pot is on board any lobsters are unloaded into a bin and if there is any by-catch (non-target species), this is quickly returned to the water alive. The lobsters are checked for size using a specially designed gauge and any undersize or berried females (those carrying visible eggs) are quickly returned to the water while those of legal size are placed in a re-circulating holding tank with a number of separate crates, plenty of fresh seawater being circulated and with a lid to keep them out of the sunlight. While the skipper is sorting through the catch the deckie re-baits the pot using a wire mesh and a plastic container that is fixed to the inside of the pot. The skipper records the catch each pot including the number of returned undersize and berried females.



Image 3

With the pot re-baited it is time to re-set the pot. The skipper looks for 'good bottom' on the sounder, checks for tidal flow, swell etc, and makes an assessment of where to drop/set the pot to ensure it lands on good bottom and gives the deckie a signal to let it go. The deckie tips the pot off, ensuring he is clear of uncoiling rope and throws the buoys/'headgear' over at the end when practically all the rope is back in the water. The timing of this procedure is important to ensure there are no rope entanglements, the deckie keeps his feet clear of the rope loops and planted firmly on the deck as the rope uncoils back into the water. As the fishing grounds can be anywhere from 20 to 75 metres in depth (some grounds are over 100 metres),

A Day in the Life of a Clean Green Rock Lobster Fisher

the use of the winch and the pot tipper is very important from both a fishing efficiency and a workplace health and safety (WH&S) perspective as the retrieval and setting can be undertaken up to 100 times per trip.



Image 4

This attention to keeping the catch live and healthy from the time they are caught to the time they arrive in the export processor's tanks ensures the very highest standards of product quality.

Once all pots have been checked and re-set it is time to head for port. During the trip back all the gear and deck is thoroughly washed down, another requirement of the Clean Green program (see image 5). Should any cleaning chemicals be used on board the vessel there are strict procedures for storage and use.

The first task upon returning to port is for the skipper to complete important paperwork required under fisheries legislation starting with part A of the Catch and Disposal Record (CDR) which records the skippers licence number, date and time, total numbers of lobsters and bin tag numbers. Part B of the CDR is completed when the catch is weighed at the electronic scales back on shore. This is done under video surveillance with the skipper using his own iButton to log on as recording the day's landed catch weight is also an important fisheries legislative requirement. The scales provide a print out of the remaining quota to be caught once that day's catch is deducted.

Once the day's catch is weighed and recorded the skipper delivers the catch to a buyer who is usually waiting at the port with a refrigerated vehicle to take the lobster to an export processing facility where they are quickly placed in seawater holding tanks. This attention to keeping the catch live and healthy from the time they are caught to the time



Image 5

they arrive in the export processor's tanks ensures the very highest standards of product quality.

As part of the Clean Green program, fuelling the vessel and changing oil all have procedures to be followed so as to minimise the potential for any spills or leakages. This Fact Sheet describes the operations of a Clean Green Fisher who operates from their home port on a daily basis. However some rock lobster fishers can stay out at sea for up to seven days or even longer). Longer trips are required to deal with longer distances to fishing grounds which make it both impracticable from a time perspective and unviable from a financial perspective to travel to and from a home port every day. Referred to as multiple day trippers (or camping), these Clean Green fishermen are subject to all of the same program requirements as that of a day tripper described in this Fact Sheet. The only real difference is that they do not unload their catch as frequently.

A log book specifically developed for the program is used by all Clean Green skippers to ensure a record is kept of a range of activities associated with good manufacturing practice (GMP). These include maintaining the vessel, any interactions with protected species, any minor accidents or incidents and crew inductions.



Acknowledgements:

Southern Rocklobster limited would like to acknowledge the support of Anthony Roach and the use of his vessel *Juggernaut* to make observations of fishing activities to prepare the information for this Fact Sheet.

SRL would like to recognise the support of the Australian Government through the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation to develop this publication.

