

The numbers of small boats driving into riverside reserves each Saturday and Sunday morning is testament to what is a winter ritual for many fisherman. That is a frosty morning's lobstering on the Murrumbidgee.

I grew up lobstering in the 70's when catches were measured in hundreds and no-one had any idea about the damage being done. Everyone assumed that lobsters grew to adult size in a couple of years, not the 7-8 years it can take them to get to legal size (90mm carapace).

NSW Fisheries have set restrictive rules for lobstering in an effort to maintain a sustainable fishery. Their efforts appear to be working as a few hours lobstering can usually yield your bag limit of five large male lobsters each.

I speak to many people who find it difficult to catch lobsters in the river, but if you pay attention to a few small details, you can usually secure a feed in a few hours.

The biggest factor to catching quality lobsters is fresh bait, with the top bait being carp. Number two bait is liver and anything else in my experience is second rate.

When you secure your bait to the pot, don't just tie it in the bottom of the netting. Tie a string tightly across the middle of the ring. Make a small loop in the middle of this string and tie your bait to the loop. This ensures that your bait will always be sitting in the middle of the pot. The lobsters will have to crawl right to the centre to get the bait. If your bait was tied to the mesh and the pot was sitting crooked on the bottom, the bait will sag toward the edge of the ring (or even be outside the ring for double hoop nets). Lobsters will take the easiest route to the bait, which is not over the net, and they drop off when the pot is retrieved (usually beside the boat).

When you get to your chosen location, don't just drive up the river hurling pots out at random. Use your depth sounder to locate structure under the water where the lobsters live. They dig holes in mud & clay, not sand, so look for mud banks adjacent to drop offs. Place your pots so they sit on the bottom just in front of the dropoff. Lobsters also live in amongst the snags, so look for areas between the snags where a pot can sit flat on the bottom.

One thing I have noticed is that you will only ever get three or four checks of the pots before the lobsters stop moving. It doesn't matter what time of day it is, if you pull up your pots and set them in a totally different section of river some kilometres away, you will continue to catch them.

The lads at Rod's Custom Rod's can show you how to set up your pots to maximise their efficiency and whilst there you can check out the bait clips which make baiting up a quick and simple task (especially on an icy morning). The clips also stop lobsters pulling well chewed baits off the pots.

Make sure that you take your lures when you go as you can usually pick up a cod or two whilst trolling between your pots.