

# Outfitting for Lobster Season 2003-2004

**BY PAT MCDONELL**  
WON Staff Writer

**SAN CLEMENTE** — Hoops. To the average person, that could mean the Hula Hoop, a toy that took America by storm in the '60s, or it could refer to the Shaq's profession. But for those in the know in sportfishing, "hoop" makes their eyes glaze over. In late September, hoop means, "Get me the melted butter!"

Sept. 27 marks the season opener for California's lobster, a delicacy that is within reach of any angler with a boat of practically any size, or strength to pull a netted hoop from a pier. Fellow staffer Kit McNear about had a heart attack last November when he walked down to Dana Wharf at 11 p.m. near his home and spied four skiff anglers unloading full limits. All were taken with the use of hoop nets.

"What was amazing was that a number of bugs were over 5 pounds," said McNear, a former Navy diver and now a NAUI-certified scuba instructor. "It was unbelievable. It was a real eye opener for me. You don't have to get in a leaky, cold wetsuit in murky water to get those critters. You can get 'em successfully with hoop nets off your private boat. You're warmer, it's safer, and the bugs are bigger."

And, McNear, added, the bugs are nocturnal and the action can be fast and furious. A limit of lobster can come quickly, in one or two sets or multiple sets, or you can put out one or two hoops, wait a half-hour for the bugs to come crawlin', and up comes

the No. 1 guest at tomorrow night's dinner party.

Indeed, the sport is unknown to many, at least until recent years. Now, lobster or bug hunting has grown in popularity and has gathered droves of anglers flocking to our Southern California waters in pursuit of these colorful crustaceans.

For those who haven't the slightest clue about this recent craze, here are some insights on the basics and the necessary equipment and accessories needed for a successful lobster hunt, according to Ben Hong, of Promar nets.

**Hoop Nets:** "Legally the only permissi-



**AVERAGE LEGAL BUG** - Lobsters like this one can be found in abundance along Southern California's rocky inshore, at piers and jetties.

ble way to take lobsters in California by a recreational angler is with a hoop net or by hand. Unless you're a diver and have swift hands, you need to get yourself some hoop nets. The hoop net is named such because the net forms the shape of a basketball hoop, commonly sold with two rings (a 32-inch upper ring and a 12-inch lower ring)," said Hong.

He said the net is baited and lowered into rocky areas and usually fished along the depth contours in waters less than 100 feet. A



**FULL NET OF BUGS** - Lobster fishing with hoop nets can be easily done from a kayak, which in many cases is the preferred method. This net of lobsters was caught in a Southern California harbor.

recreational angler in California can have up to five nets and, if on a boat, the vessel can only have up to a total of 10 nets aboard regardless of the number of anglers. See regulations.

**Rigging:** Hong said the typical rigging of a hoop net involves a bridle or support arms, which attaches a certain length of rope (typically no longer than 100 feet) to the hoop net's upper ring.

"A large marker float is attached at the tail end of the rope, which serves the purpose of locating the net once deployed. Since lobsters are nocturnal feeders and crawl along the ocean floor in search of food during dark hours, many hoop netters incorporate the use of glow sticks or reflective tape on their marker floats, making them easier to locate at night," said Hong.

One way to see them in the darkness is to attach the hoop line above the water to a 1 gallon plastic jug with the light stick in it. Set out the hoops with the floating jugs in a line, and pull them up in that same sequence.

**Bait:** Since lobsters primarily locate food through scent, the pungent carcasses of fish such as mackerel, sardines, or squid are all excellent selections for bait.

"Personally my favorite bait, which produces great results time and time again is tuna bellies," said Hong. "Lobsters and crabs seem to always pick up this scent trail of oily flesh as it is emitted in the water. So here's a tip: next time you come back from your albacore trip, save some bellies for hoop netting."

Generally, bait is secured to the net through the use of a bait cage or directly

LOBSTER/47



**PROMAR HOOP NET** - Simply add bait and then lower onto a flat area near structure in waters less than 100 feet - then get the butter!

## Hoop Netting Regulations

Below are the 2003 DFG regulations with the corresponding DFG code:

1. 7256 - Spiny lobster may not be taken under sportfishing license except by use of a hoop net or by hand.
2. 29.80(b) - Gear Restrictions: Not more than five baited hoop nets may be fished by a person to take spiny lobster and crab, not to exceed a total of 10 baited hoop nets fished from any vessel.
3. 29.90 (a) - Open Season: From the Saturday preceding the first Wednesday in October through the first Wednesday after the 15th of March.
4. 29.90 (b) - Limit: Seven per person.
5. 29.90 (c) - Minimum Size: Three and one-fourth inches measured in a straight line on the mid-line of the back from the rear edge of the eye socket to the rear edge of the body shell.



**BEN HONG OF PROMAR** nets holds one of his new hoops with the special bait pouch. He was showing off the hoops at last year's Fred Hall Long Beach show.

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# Lobster...

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tyed to the bottom of the net. Recently, Promar has developed a hoop net with a patented double-layered bait pouch woven into the bottom ring of the hoop net which conveniently stores the bait without using cable ties or wire. The double layer seems to also impede seals or other predators from stealing the bait out of the nets.

To find out more about these nets visit [www.promarnets.com](http://www.promarnets.com).

**Boats and Kayaks:** Although there is no *wrong* boat to use when hoop netting, here are some important points to keep in mind for safety purposes and effectiveness on the water: Visibility: An unobstructed 360 degree view of

the water is a great asset when trying to locate the bobbing marker floats of the nets. Maneuverability: With 10 nets, including ropes and floats in the water at a time, it's important to be able to weave in and out of the rigging without getting a prop tangled up.

"Boaters with less experience maneuvering their boats should practice in the daylight before embarking on a nighttime hoop netting journey," said Hong.

Kayak hoop netting is now beginning to gain much popularity due to the ease of maneuverability; scope of visibility; and the fact that some of the best lobster hoop netting is right inside the harbors. Kayak lobster hoop netting clinics are readily available and can be found at just about every harbor

up and down the California coast.

Coastal Kayak Fishing offers these courses and can be found at [www.kayakfishing.com](http://www.kayakfishing.com)

**Anchor:** During the early months following the season opener, lobsters move into shallow waters and inhabit rocky areas and usually can be found up along the shallows of a jetty or break wall - which is where the majority of the hoop netting will be done. Thus, due to the close proximity to crashing surf on jetties, break walls, or boiler rocks, every vessel should be outfitted with an adequate anchor which can be readily deployed when needed. "Hoop netting is fun," said Hong, "but safety is still always number one."

**Electronics:** Sonar and GPS are great tools for finding reefs and rocky areas where lobsters make their home. On the sonar; look for depth contour drops and fluctuations situated near rocky bottoms - lobsters tend to inhabit these areas as they hide inside the cracks and crevices of the rocky terrain.

"You do not want to drop your nets directly onto the structure but rather on the flat bottom adjacent to the structure, which can be achieved by metering around and studying your sonar. A GPS unit also comes in handy for marking nets in the darkness of the night," he said. "Since a vessel is allowed to fish a maximum of 10 nets, many hoop netters will set out 10 nets at a time, marking each net on the GPS, which proves to be especially helpful when retrieving

your boat later, you run your boat even when the loads are light. So we left the dock at Seaforth Sportfishing with just 9 anglers aboard for a trip that normally carries 20.

We got kicked around pretty good on the run southwest to a spot between the stem of the Mushroom Bank and the Dumper just 75 miles from Mission Bay.

The weather was still up and the sun wasn't when Hughes stopped the *Cortez* on a meter mark at 6 a.m.. An albie or two bit, but most of the biters were skipjack. Going to the troll, the first couple jig strikes were skippy. You could see boats in every direction on the horizon.

Then we got the stop you hope for - big, fat albacore ready to chew everything from sardines to the plastic Fish Traps Brightenburg handed out. After hooking a skipkie on his first bait of the morning, Bob Blum hooked 4 albacore 30 pounds and up on the next 4 sardines he cast out.

About the time the *Royal Polaris* got stopped just upswell of us, bluefin flashed through. They played smash and run with most of the baits, but there



**HUGE SPIDER CRAB** - It's not all about lobsters. Great catches of spider crab can also be had when hoop netting from a kayak.



**AVERAGE BUG**- Lobster hoop netting from a kayak is a prolific way to capitalize on the great lobster fishery here in California.

**BY RICH HOLLAND**  
WON Staff Writer

**SAN DIEGO** - Nothing in life is perfect, so when Barry Brightenburg of Fish Trap Lures called to say a mixup meant only a half dozen or so anglers were signed up for his 1½-day charter on the *Cortez*, the decision to go that night was easy despite ominous buoy readings out on the Tanner Bank.

Sometimes things just can't work out any better. Jim Hughes, owner/operator of the *Cortez*, is the kind of old school captain who knows if you want to run

directly on the water.

"There are numerous piers up and down the California coast which offer some of the best hoop netting since many of these piers are situated near or on top of natural and artificial reefs. Often during the height of lobster season daily bag limits can be attained in a few hours of successful hoop netting on a pier. The versatility of the hoop net also serves as a great pier landing net, which makes this a must-have tool when fishing on a pier."

Hoop netting is really not a rocket science sport but as simple as it sounds, it is one of the most effective ways to catch lobsters, crabs, and even sport fish in California. So before the opener on Sept. 27 get your gear ready, catch some bugs, and you'll be eating good!

in low light conditions.

**Accessories:** Other accessories to bring as you embark upon your hoop net adventure should include a high-powered spotlight, helpful when trying to locate your marker buoys; warm clothing or slickers as you will most definitely get wet when pulling on the hoop nets; and a gaff or boat hook will also come in handy when retrieving nets.

"I recommend a telescopic gaff or boat hook, which can fold up and store away, since you want to keep a clear deck for all the rigging on each net," said Hong.

**Where to hoop net:** Although much of Hong's advice has been dedicated to the kayak or private boat hoop netter he added that some of the best lobster hoop netting does not require getting

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