



YOUR TEAM IS GOING TO RESEARCH

Legal protection for crabs and lobsters

and speak **for and against** including crabs and lobsters in animal welfare law

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This brief has been produced as part of the *RSPCA's Animal Welfare: The Great Debate* and is a starting point for the research you will need to do into the subject in order to ensure a successful debate. The points for or against a subject may not be RSPCA policy and represent some of the wider thinking around the subject.

- As invertebrates (animals without a backbone), crabs and lobsters - both crustaceans - are currently not covered by animal welfare law in most countries. This means people can treat them how they like. Nothing done to a crab or lobster by a person is illegal.
- Recent research strongly suggests crabs and lobsters are sentient beings, just like other animals. This means they experience positive or negative feelings, such as pleasure or pain. People used to think that only vertebrates (animals with a backbone) such as mammals and birds were capable of having these experiences - which is why only they are protected by animal welfare law.
- The scientific research on this issue hasn't yet been able to prove that crabs and lobsters are sentient. Some people argue that the brains of animals like crabs and lobsters are just too simple to process pain.
- One suggestion is that people should consider how they treat animals using the precautionary principle. This means that when the evidence of sentience is still considered inconclusive, the animals should be given 'the benefit of the doubt' and provided the same level of legal protection as those we know can feel pain and suffer.

FOR

Here are some points **in favour** of making laws to protect crabs and lobsters – what other points can you find?

- The latest research shows that crabs and lobsters are likely sentient beings. We should amend our laws and behaviour towards animals when science brings new evidence to light
- Crabs and lobsters are caught to provide food for people and they should be protected in the same way as other farm animals
- People have a moral responsibility not to cause unnecessary pain and suffering to sentient animals, regardless of how they look or where they live

AGAINST

Here are some reasons why it is **not necessary** – can you find any more?

- Crabs and lobsters are very different to other animals. There's not as much clear evidence that they are sentient – and humans have very little contact with them. Why do they need extra protection?
- Taking crabs and lobsters from the seas is really important to the survival of small fishing communities and many people would lose their way of life if new regulations made it too difficult to catch and sell them
- Boiling a lobster alive – the traditional cooking method – is said to improve a humans' dining experience and the quality of flavour.

Information you may want to find out

- What sort of research has been done to find out which types of animals are sentient?
- How are animal protection laws made? Has there been any attempt to change the law to protect crabs and lobsters in the UK?
- Which countries currently have laws that protect crabs and lobsters?
- How are crabs and lobsters caught and killed? How many crabs and lobsters are caught in UK waters every year?

Potential sources of information

- RSPCA website: www.rspca.cymru
- Political Animal website: www.politicalanimal.wales
- RSPCA facts and figures: <http://media.rspca.org.uk/media/facts>
- <https://www.crustaceancompassion.org.uk>
- www.thelovepost.global/protection/articles/are-crabs-and-lobsters-sentient
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crab-and-lobster-stock-assessment-2017>
- <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-the-most-humane-way-to-kill-crustaceans-for-human-consumption>
- www.thetimes.co.uk/article/crustacean-liberation-as-rspca-spreads-its-tentacles-w8mcsqrs
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-42873644>
- <https://www.worldanimalprotection.org.uk/blogs/moral-status-crustaceans-where-are-we>

Reading

- The Secret Life of Lobsters: How Fishermen and Scientists Are Unraveling the Mysteries of Our Favorite Crustacean – 1 May 2005 by Trevor Corson

