



Department of
Primary Industries and
Regional Development

Protect
Grow
Innovate

Crabbing code of conduct

Recreational crabbing in Western Australia



Published September 2023

This code of conduct provides guidelines on best fishing practices for recreational crabbing in Western Australia. The code encourages sustainable fishing behaviour and practices to ensure there will be plenty of crabs for the future.

The code covers:

- complying with size and bag limit regulations
- ensuring juvenile and berried females are not removed from the fishery
- maximising survival of released crabs and
- minimising impacts on the environment whilst fishing.

Together, these measures will help to safeguard crab abundance for future generations.

Published by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Perth, Western Australia.

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Recreational crabbing in Western Australia

Crabbing is an extremely popular pastime in WA. The most commonly caught species are blue swimmer crabs (*Portunus armatus*) and mud crabs (*Scylla olivacea*; *Scylla serrata*). In WA, blue-swimmer crabs are typically found from Port Hedland to Dunsborough, while mud crabs are typically found from Shark Bay to the Northern Territory border.

Recreational fishers can target all crab species from a boat (usually using drop nets) or the shore (either using scoops or collecting them by hand or using blunt crab hooks).



Crabbing is a popular activity to enjoy with the whole family

Peel-Harvey Estuary and Marine Stewardship Council Certification

The Peel-Harvey Estuary is the largest estuarine system in the South West, with an area of 134 square kilometres. As well as being a hotspot for recreational crabbing and fishing activities, the estuary is important for waterbirds and waders, including migratory shorebirds, which travel to its shores from as far away as Siberia. The estuary forms a key part of the Peel-Yalgorup wetland system – a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, which regularly supports more than 20,000 birds.

The Peel-Harvey recreational crab fishery is the only recreational fishery in the world to be certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) – an internationally recognised gold standard for sustainably managed fisheries. The certification process involves regular checks on the fishery’s sustainability and its impacts on the broader Peel-Harvey Estuary ecosystem. It’s a further check and balance to ensure quality of the Peel-Harvey estuary environment is maintained and that there will be plenty of crabs for the future for everyone to enjoy.

Recreational fishers play a huge role in maintaining the MSC accreditation by:

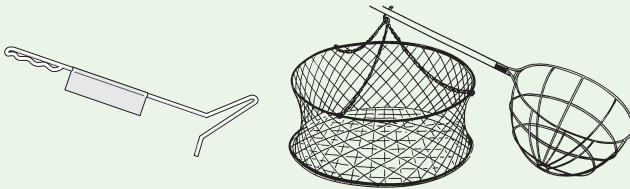
- following the rules in place for the blue-swimmer crab fishery
- quickly and carefully releasing protected crabs (under size and/or berried) and
- minimising impacts on the broader ecosystem, such as habitat, plants and animals.

Catching

- Be a responsible fisher. Make sure you are across the appropriate crabbing gear, closed areas, rules and banned activities before you head out.
- Do not scoop crabs that are obviously undersized.

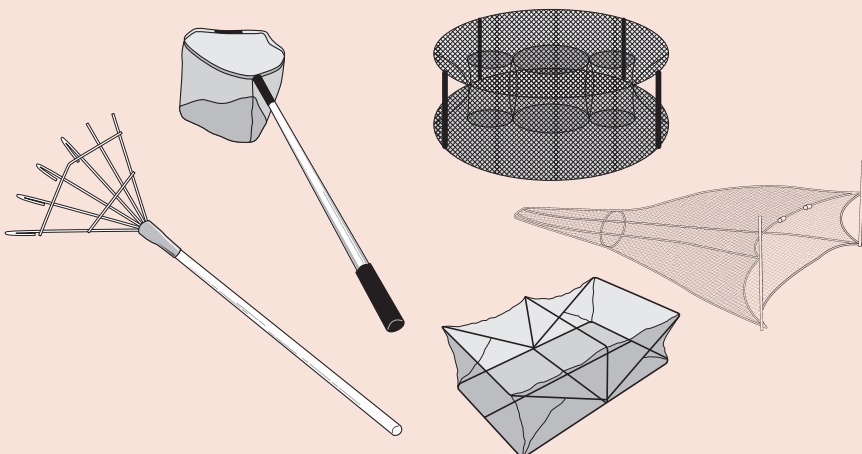
Legal:

Wire hook, drop net or scoop net

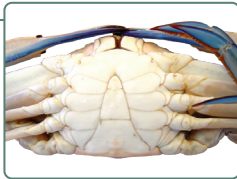


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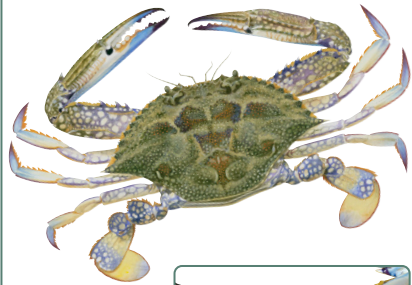
Crabbing rake, landing net, commercial type round trap, fishing nets, prawn trawls or dip nets



Male



Female



Berried
(egg-carrying)
females

- Measure your crabs and check for eggs as soon as they are caught, returning undersized crabs and berried females to the water immediately and before you catch another. Juvenile or berried crabs are protected to give them a chance to spawn.
- Do not 'high-grade' your catch. High grading is when people keep fishing for larger crabs, even after they have caught their bag limit. Crabs that have been out of the water for an extended period of time, for even up to 10 minutes on a warm day are not likely to survive when you release them.
- Keep count of your catch as you go and stop crabbing as soon as you reach your bag limit.



Handling

- Minimise crab handling as much as possible, especially if it is undersized or a berried female.
- If necessary, crabs can be safely handled by holding their back swimming legs (swimmerets) to avoid getting pinched by their claws.
- Keep the crab in water until you are ready to measure it.
- Have a measuring gauge close at hand to measure crabs immediately after capture.
- If you must place a crab on a surface, choose something cool, soft and wet.



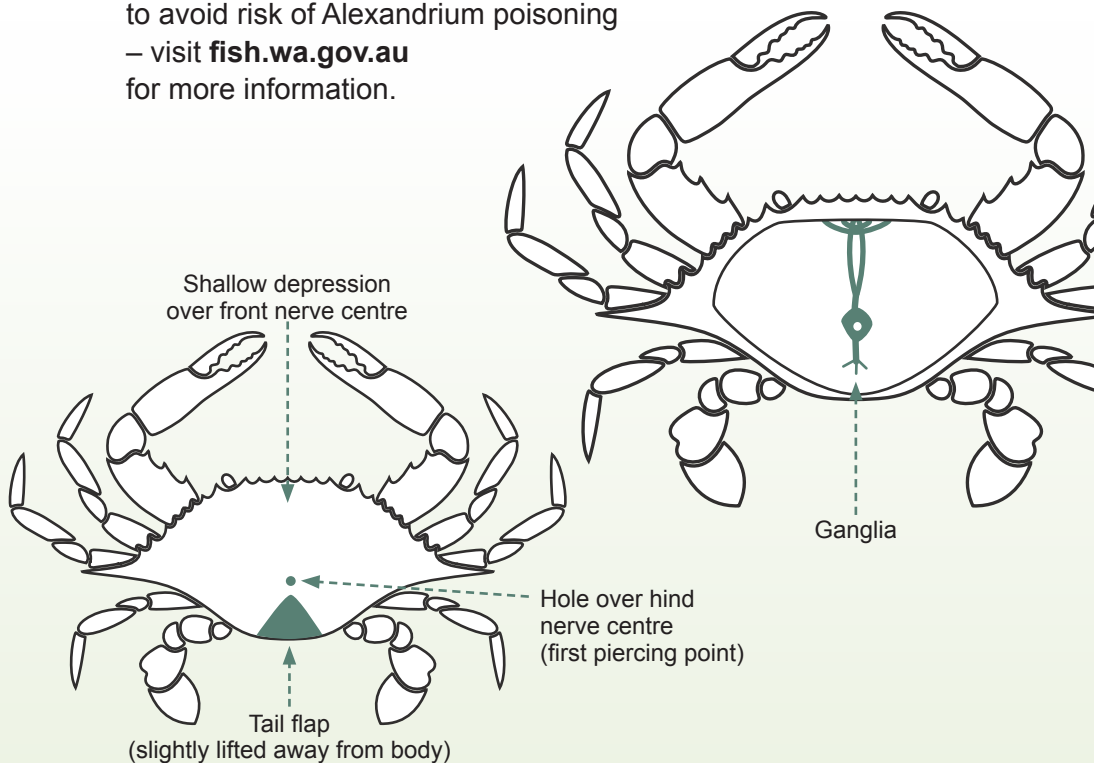
Mandurah crabbing

Releasing

- Carefully and immediately return any undersized or berried crabs back into the water before another crab is taken.
- Release crabs carefully, ideally by lowering the scoop back into the water.
- If using drop nets, undersized or berried crabs must be returned before pulling the next drop net.
- If crabs that must be released are tangled in a drop net, or won't let go of a scoop net, place the drop/scoop net upside down in the water until they let go. Flinging crabs out of nets causes them to lose claws and/or legs, increasing the chances of post-release mortality.

Keeping crabs for consumption

- Minimise handling the crab prior to despatch, as this reduces stress.
- Crabs can be humanely despatched by:
 - piercing the two main nerve centres or
 - placing them in a freezer, or immersing in chilled water for up to 20 minutes.
- Crabs are best eaten fresh, so only keep enough for your immediate consumption.
- All uncooked crabs must be kept in whole form, unless being prepared for immediate consumption.
- Crabs caught from the Swan-Canning system in the summer months should be cleaned before freezing or eating to avoid risk of *Alexandrium* poisoning – visit fish.wa.gov.au for more information.



Responsible fishing

- Respect the environment and use established roads and tracks to access your crabbing spots.
- Throw all rubbish in bins. If there are no bins available, take it home with you for disposal.
- Avoid disturbing wildlife by getting too close, creating excessive noise, or allowing your crabbing activities to adversely interact with wildlife.
- If crabbing from the shore, keep your distance from birds you may see. WA supports many endangered, threatened and protected migratory bird species over the spring and summer months. These birds need to gain weight for their migration to the northern hemisphere and disturbing them may reduce their chances of a successful migration.
- If crabbing from a boat, slow down if you see any large animals (such as dolphins and dugongs) near the surface. They are vulnerable to being struck by boat hulls.
- Anchor on a sandy bottom, not on seagrass beds.

Safety

- Always check weather conditions before you go crabbing.
- Consider not crabbing alone if inexperienced.
- If you cannot swim, avoid going in the water.
- If boating for crabs, wear a lifejacket while on board.
- Wear appropriate gear when crabbing.
- If using drop nets, make sure floats are visible and not in main boating channels.

Pest species

Pests and diseases pose a serious threat to WA's aquatic environment, as well as the tourism, aquaculture and fishing industries.

If you catch or spot a pest species, such as the Asian Paddle Crab, you must not release this back into the waterway. Despatch it humanely and dispose of it away from the waterway to avoid possibility of spreading diseases.

Make sure to contact FishWatch on 1800 815 507 to report sightings of pest species.

Follow the rules

You can play your part to ensure we have fish for the future by fishing responsibly and abiding by the recreational fishing rules.

It's easy to keep up to date with WA's recreational fishing rules online at fish.wa.gov.au/rules, in the **Recreational fishing guide**, or the handy **Crabbing for blue swimmer crabs guide**, available in several languages at fish.wa.gov.au/blueswimmer

The Recfishwest App is another easy way to access WA's fishing rules even if you're out of phone range. The Recfishwest App is free to download from the Apple App Store and Google Play and has a useful Fish ID function to help identify any unfamiliar species.



Report any illegal fishing activities to FishWatch on 1800 815 507 or online at crimestopperswa.com.au/organisation-report/

Contact us

1300 374 731 (1300 DPIRD1)

enquiries@dpird.wa.gov.au



Scan to view our video on
Mandurah Blue Swimmer Crabs,
how to handle and measure.

Important disclaimer

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Scan to report
illegal fishing