

## **BLUE CRABS – Containers and Limits**

### **What is being considered?**

The Department is considering the following container definitions utilizing inside dimensions for a bushel (recreational and commercial use), a lug (commercial use only), and a barrel (commercial use only).

1. Bushel:
  1. Circular: 18” top diameter x 12” height x 13.5” bottom diameter
  2. Rectangular: 11” height x 19.5” length x 12.5” width
2. Lug: 22-7/8” top length x 14-7/8” top width x 21” bottom length x 13” bottom width x 12-3/8” height
3. Barrel: 20.5” top diameter x 27.5” height x 18” bottom diameter

The Department is considering requiring all commercial hard crab harvest be held in a defined container, be separated by sex, and prohibit container mixing onboard a vessel. Daily hard crab catch limits by container and license type for commercial crabbers in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries will be established by public notice.

Certain daily limits are currently described in regulation in bushel amounts. The Department is considering adding the limits for the allowable alternative containers. Commercial daily hard crab catch limits for Worcester County would be specified as 25 bushels, 16 lugs, or 10 barrels, and daily hard male crab catch limits for commercial finfish gear would be specified as 2 bushels or 1 lug. Daily hard female catch limits for commercial finfish gear will remain restricted to the daily maximum number of female crabs allowed by the individual's license type as established by public notice.

The Department is considering two options for better specifying the recreational hard male crab daily catch limit:

**Option 1:** The recreational hard male crab daily catch limit for a licensed individual is one bushel when using a bushel to hold crabs. When not using a bushel to hold crabs, the hard male crab daily catch limit for a licensed individual is six dozen.

**Option 2:** The recreational hard male crab daily catch limit for a licensed individual, regardless of the container being used to hold crabs, is six dozen.

### **Why is this change necessary?**

Clearly identifying containers will promote compliance and enforceability of daily catch limits, which are used to ensure blue crab harvest from the Chesapeake Bay does not exceed the exploitation fraction thresholds established in Amendment 2 to the Chesapeake Bay Blue Crab Fishery Management Plan. These changes will also provide greater consistency for how male and female crabs are regulated and help simplify the blue crab regulations.

### **Who will this affect?**

Commercial and recreational crabbers in Maryland waters.

**When will this be effective?**

The Department expects this change could be effective by spring 2024; however, the exact date cannot be determined. The Department will follow our normal scoping and proposal procedures if this concept moves forward.

**Has this change been discussed with stakeholders?**

This was discussed with the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission and Sportfish Fisheries Advisory Commission at their October 2023 meetings.