



Commercial crab fisheries

Most commercial crab fishing operations in Queensland are small-scale businesses, and many licensed crab fishers are also licensed to work in the inshore net fishery.

In Queensland, commercial crab fishers operate in 3 different fisheries:

- mud crab fishery
- blue swimmer crab fishery
- spanner crab fishery.

This guide contains information about commercial crab fishing in Queensland, including managed areas, gear used, regulations and licensing.

Commercial crab species

Mud crab fishery

Commercial fishers mostly use baited crab pots to catch mud crabs [<http://www.daf.qld.gov.au/fisheries/species-identification/inshore-estuarine-species/mud-crab>].

Most mud crabs are caught between December and June in intertidal waters. The major mud-crabbing areas are Moreton Bay, the Narrows (near Gladstone), Hinchinbrook Channel and Princess Charlotte Bay. Mud crab catch in the Gulf of Carpentaria typically contributes less than 20% to the total Queensland catch, which has averaged approximately 1000t annually over the past 5 years.

Mud crabs are an important species to the tourist and hospitality trade. They are sold into local and interstate markets.

For more information about the fishery, read the latest mud crab annual status report [<http://www.daf.qld.gov.au/fisheries/monitoring-our-fisheries/data-reports/sustainability-reporting/fishery-updates/mud-crab-fishery>].

Blue swimmer crab fishery

Commercial fishers mainly use baited collapsible pots. Blue swimmers [<http://www.daf.qld.gov.au/fisheries/species-identification/inshore-estuarine-species/blue-swimmer-crab>] are also taken by prawn and scallop trawling.

About 80% of the blue swimmer crab harvest, which has averaged approximately 630t annually over the past 5 years, is taken between November and May in water deeper than 3m, mainly in Moreton Bay and Hervey Bay. Crabs are also harvested in nearby offshore waters in depths up to 60m.

Most blue swimmers are sold within southern Queensland, but some are sold interstate. There is virtually no overseas export. The main product form is fresh-chilled, with a portion of the catch sold as crab meat and processed derivatives.

For more information about the fishery, read the latest blue swimmer crab annual status report [<http://www.daf.qld.gov.au/fisheries/monitoring-our-fisheries/data-reports/sustainability-reporting/fishery-updates/blue-swimmer-crab-fishery>].

Spanner crab fishery

Commercial spanner-crabbers are required to use dillies.

Spanner crabs [<http://www.daf.qld.gov.au/fisheries/species-identification/inshore-estuarine-species/spanner-crab>] are harvested all year round, except during a one-month spawning season from 20 November to 20 December. Most of the Queensland catch is taken in deep oceanic waters south of Yeppoon.

The fishery is managed through a total allowable catch control (TACC), currently set at 1923t, with individual transferable quotas (ITQs) also issued to fishers. The spanner crab harvest has averaged approximately 1300t annually over the past 5 years.

The bulk of the catch is exported as live product to East Asia, mainly Taiwan. The crabs are cooled to about 15°C and packed in polystyrene boxes for transportation by air. A small amount of spanner crab is also sold as chilled cooked product on local and interstate markets.

For more information about the fishery, download the latest spanner crab annual status report [<http://www.daf.qld.gov.au/fisheries/monitoring-our-fisheries/data-reports/sustainability-reporting/fishery-updates/spanner-crab-fishery>].

Also consider...

- Find out about performance measurement systems (PMS) [<http://www.daf.qld.gov.au/fisheries/monitoring-our-fisheries/data-reports/sustainability-reporting/performance-measurement-systems>] that measure the sustainability of Queensland's fisheries.

Crab fishery managed areas

Queensland's crab fisheries operate throughout the state's coastal waters, including the Gulf of Carpentaria, except for areas that are closed to fishing in general or to crabbing in particular.

Each fishery has a defined area designated by a fishery symbol [<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/fisheries/licences/fisheries-symbols>]. These symbols prescribe a geographical area and the apparatus that may be used. The fishery symbols are:

- C1 (all crabs other than spanner crabs, i.e. mud crabs and blue swimmer crabs)
- C2 (spanner crabs, managed area A)
- C3 (spanner crabs, managed area B).

The commercial spanner crab fishery is divided into 2 managed areas - 1 in the south and 1 in the north:

- Managed area A (C2 fishery symbol) is fully developed and accounts for over 95% of the total catch of spanner crabs. The fishery is managed through a total allowable catch (TAC) quota and individual transferable quotas (ITQs).
- Managed area B (C3 fishery symbol) is managed via a daily quota, or in-possession limit. The fishery is only small, in both catch and number of participants.

Commercial fishers require a commercial fishing boat licence [<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/fisheries/licences/boat-licence>] endorsed with these symbols to

harvest crabs in the respective areas.

Also consider...

- Read the Fisheries Regulation 2008 [<https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/sl-2008-0083>] for a description and full details of each fishery symbol.
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Commercial crab fishing gear

Mud crabs and blue swimmer crabs

The main apparatus used by commercial fishers to catch mud crabs and blue swimmer crabs are wire-mesh crab pots and trawl-mesh (nylon) crab pots.

The pots are set on the bottom, generally in estuarine or near-shore areas for mud crabs and near-shore and offshore areas for blue swimmer crabs.

Fishers operating in offshore waters usually set their gear in trotlines of about 10 pots per line. The trotline consists of pots attached to each other with a buoy set at one end of the line and a flagged buoy set at the other end.

The fisher usually checks them daily or on each rising tide, hauling them by hand-hydraulic winch, removing the catch, and then rebaiting and resetting them.

Spanner crabs

Commercial spanner crab fishers are required by law to use dillies - frames with netting stretched across them - no more than 1m square in size.

A bait bag containing 3 or 4 bait fish is attached to each dilly. Ten or 15 dillies are clipped to a trotline by a short rope at about 50m intervals. Each trotline is marked by a flagged buoy.

The gear is left in the water for 30-60 minutes and then winched up. As the nets come aboard they are cleared of crabs. The undersized crabs are immediately returned to the water, and the legal-sized crabs are kept alive.

Also consider...

- Read the Fisheries Regulation 2008 [<https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/sl-2008-0083>] for detailed information about commercial crab fishing gear.
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Government controls and legislation for crab fisheries

Licensing

There are 430 commercial crabbing licences that allow the take of blue swimmer crab and mud crabs and about 200 spanner crab licences in Queensland. Less than 70 of the 200 spanner crab licences hold quota to access the fishery. Commercial crab fishers comply with the following licensing laws:

- The fisher must have a commercial fisher licence [<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/fisheries/licences/fisher-licence>].

- The boat must be licensed with a commercial fishing boat licence [<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/fisheries/licences/boat-licence>].
- The boat licence must be officially endorsed with a fishery symbol [<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/fisheries/licences/fisheries-symbols>] for the particular fishery (i.e. C1, C2 and/or C3).
- To take spanner crabs in managed area A, a commercial fisher also needs to hold spanner crab quota.

No new licences or symbols are issued for existing fisheries. To enter a fishery, you must first obtain the correct licence and symbol(s) from an existing operator. An exception exists for the C2 fishery symbol; however, a new C2 symbol will only be issued where a fisher has acquired spanner crab quota from another quota holder.

Licences can be transferred from person to person and fishery symbols can be transferred from one licence to another licence.

Monitoring and reporting

Commercial fishers have a legal obligation to report information about their fishing activities in a compulsory daily logbook [<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/fisheries/monitoring-reporting/requirements/logbooks>]. All crab fishers must contribute data about their day's catch, the location fished, the gear used and any interactions with species of conservation interest. Fisheries Queensland uses this data to assess and monitor the status of individual species and fisheries [<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/fisheries/monitoring-reporting/monitoring>] in Queensland.

Regulations

The following laws apply to Queensland's commercial crab fisheries. For more detailed information, refer to the Fisheries Regulation 2008 [<https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/sl-2008-0083>].

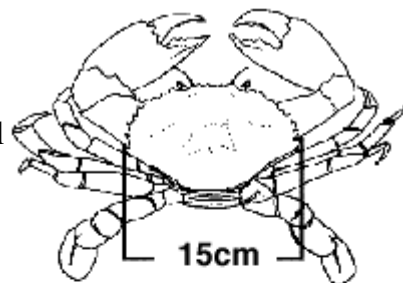
Mud crab fishery

- Licence to be marked with a C1 fishery symbol [<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/fisheries/licences/fisheries-symbols>].
- Take limited to crabs only (but not spanner crabs).
- Females must be returned to the water.
- Minimum size 15cm across carapace (tip to tip).
- No total catch limit.
- No individual catch limit.
- Maximum of 50 pots, traps and dillies if the C1 fishery symbol is written on a licence once. If the C1 fishery symbol is written on a licence more than once, a maximum of 100 pots, traps and dillies.

Blue swimmer crab fishery

- Licence to be marked with a C1 fishery symbol [<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/fisheries/licences/fisheries-symbols>].
- Take limited to crabs only (but not spanner crabs).
- Females must be returned to the water.
- Minimum size 11.5cm across carapace (notch to notch).

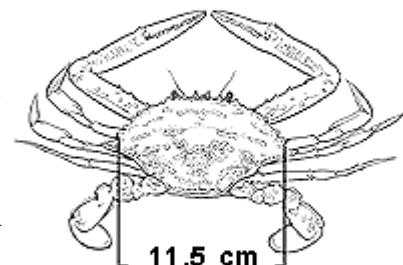
- No total catch limit.
- No individual catch limit.
- Maximum of 50 pots, traps and dillies if the C1 fishery symbol is written on a licence once. If the C1 fishery symbol is written on a licence more than once, a maximum of 100 pots, traps and dillies.



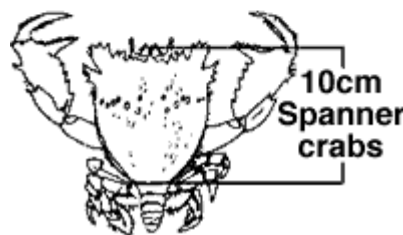
mud crab

Spanner crab fishery

- Licence to be marked with a C2 or C3 fishery symbol [<http://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/fisheries/licences/fisheries-symbols>].
- Take limited to spanner crabs only.
- Berried females (i.e. females carrying eggs) must be returned to the water.
- Minimum size 10cm carapace length.
- A total allowable commercial catch is set once every 2 years for the managed area A of the spanner crab fishery.
- An individual transferable quota (ITQ) applies to managed area A (ITQ can be traded between spanner crab fishers). Daily in-possession limits also apply to managed area B.
- Pots, traps and dillies limit
 - managed area A: 45 at a time
 - managed area B: 30 at a time.
- Daily in-possession limits also apply to managed area B.



blue swimmer crab

10cm
Spanner
crabs

Other relevant legislation

- *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* (Cwlth) [<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2016C00342>]
- *Marine Parks Act 2004* [<https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2004-031>]
- *Fisheries Act 1994* [<https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1994-037>]

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