

## **Blue Crabs – Addition of Lug Container for Holding Mature Female Crabs**

### **What was proposed?**

The action defines a “lug” as a rectangular-shaped container that does not exceed the following inside dimensions: 22-7/8 inches in length across the top, 14-7/8 inches in width across the top; 21 inches length across the bottom; 13 inches width across the bottom; and 12-3/8 inches height. Containers of these dimensions are already in use in the commercial crab fishery to hold male hard crabs.

The action allows the harvest of mature female hard crabs in lugs, in addition to bushels and barrels. Current regulation requires mature female hard crab harvest be held in either bushels or barrels. A shortage of wooden bushel baskets has left the commercial crabbing industry with few options for holding mature female hard crab harvest. The industry has identified the lug as the preferred alternate container, but it is larger than a bushel basket and therefore needs to be defined in regulation and included as a container that can be used to hold mature female hard crab harvest. To set catch limits by lug, the Department will temporarily use a conversion factor of 1.5 (1 lug equals 1.5 bushels) until additional data can be obtained to refine the conversion better.

Lastly, the action requires hard crabs to be kept in containers of identical dimensions. If harvesters were to mix containers, it would be difficult for the Department to set understandable catch limits. By prohibiting the “mixing and matching” of containers on board a vessel, catch limits will be more easily enforced. Daily catch limits are an integral component of the Department’s ability to ensure the fisheries do not overharvest crabs.

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

Regulation requires mature female hard crab harvest be held in bushels or barrels. A shortage of wooden bushel baskets has left the commercial crabbing industry with few options for holding mature female hard crab harvest. The industry has identified the lug as the preferred alternate container, but it is larger than a bushel basket and therefore needs to be defined in regulation and included as a container that can be used to hold mature female hard crab harvest.

Daily catch limits are an integral component of the Department’s ability to ensure the fisheries do not overharvest crabs. Prohibiting container mixing provides simplicity for compliance and enforcement of limits.

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

Commercial crabbers who crab in Maryland waters.

### **When did this become effective?**

The Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive and Legislative Review approved this change effective September 5, 2023. Emergency status has been granted through December 31, 2023.

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

The lug was discussed with the Blue Crab Industry Advisory Committee (BCIAC) at their December 2022 meeting and the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission (TFAC) at their January

2023 meeting. The specifics outlined in this proposal were discussed with the BCIAC at their June 2023 meeting and TFAC at their July 2023 meeting. The Department will follow our normal proposal procedures for a permanent regulation beginning with scoping the change at the October meetings of TFAC and the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission (SFAC).