

BLUE CRABS - Commercial Vessel Day Off

What was proposed?

The Department proposed to modify the commercial crabbing day off rules in the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries. Specifically, the proposed action removes the prohibition on using a vessel for commercial crabbing purposes on the owner's declared day off and removes the requirement to label vessels with the declared day off. Each licensed crabber is still limited to harvesting six days per week, but the vessel could be used seven days a week if there are multiple licensed commercial crabbers that use the vessel.

Why is this change necessary?

The prohibition on using a vessel for commercial crabbing purposes on the owner's declared day off and the requirement to label the vessel with the day off were meant to aid in the enforcement of the rule that requires commercial crabbers to take at least one day off per week. That rule is in place to manage the fishing effort for crabs. At the time the rule was implemented, it was determined that the easiest way to enforce the rule was to have each licensee mark their vessel with their day off and to prohibit the vessel from being used for commercial crabbing purposes on that day. Additionally, it was generally understood that there was limited sharing of vessels between licensees, meaning that there was usually only one licensee that used each boat.

However, as both technology and the fishery has changed, the vessel day off has not. Due to a variety of factors, it is now more common for multiple licensees to share a single vessel. Enforcement is also now able to check the licensing database remotely to verify a licensee's declared day off and their associated landing limits. If one licensee is acting as another licensee's mate on their declared day off, the vessel would still be limited to the landing limit of the individual acting as that day's captain, regardless of who actually owns the vessel.

Removing the vessel day off requirement also resolves a conflict when multiple family members own and utilize a single vessel. Removing the vessel day off will allow individuals to list different days off on their licenses to ensure that at least one family member is able to work each day, while the other family members act as their mate (not harvesting their bushel limit that day, only assisting the valid licensee in landing their limit).

The Department does not anticipate an increase in effort since the rule limiting licensees to six days of harvest will remain unchanged. Allowing the vessel to be used seven days per week may spread harvest out over the course of the week, but it is not anticipated that harvest will increase.

Who will this affect?

Commercial licensees who catch blue crabs in the Chesapeake Bay or its tidal tributaries.

What is the specific regulatory action?

Amend Regulation .14 under COMAR 08.02.03 Blue Crabs.

Has this change been discussed with advisory bodies or other interested individuals?

- This change was discussed at Blue Crab Industry Advisory Committee meetings (January 2025 and May 2025) and at January and May Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission meetings.
- The ideas were scoped with the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission (SFAC) and Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission (TFAC) at their meetings in October 2025.
- The ideas were scoped with the general public from October 20, 2025, through November 4, 2025.

Regulatory Process

Fishing rules in Maryland may be created by either the General Assembly or the Department. When the Department creates a fishing rule, it is called a regulation. When the General Assembly creates a rule, it is called a statute. The Department often has to create a regulation to implement a statute. The regulatory process begins with scoping and the Department follows normal [procedures](#) as concepts move forward.

During the scoping process, the Department gathers suggestions and ideas from stakeholders and others about how to solve a fishery problem or address a need. The goal of scoping is to identify issues, potential impacts, and reasonable alternatives associated with the issues so that management actions can be developed. After the public has had an opportunity to comment on possible management actions during the scoping process, the Department considers these comments and develops an appropriate management strategy. The ideas for this proposal were scoped from October 20, 2025, through November 4, 2025.

At the conclusion of the scoping process, the Department determined that the action is necessary and appropriate. The rules were promulgated following the Administrative Procedures Act described in Title 10, Subtitle 1 of the State Government Article Annotated Code of Maryland.

- The General Assembly's Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review Committee reviews the regulatory proposal for fiscal and legal analysis.
- The proposal was printed by the Division of State Documents in the Maryland Register on January 23, 2026.
- The Department held a virtual public hearing on February 2, 2026, at 1 p.m. No one attended the hearing.
- A 30-day public comment period began on the day of publication. The comment period ended February 23, 2026.
- After reviewing the comments, the Department decided to adopt the changes as proposed.
- The notice of final action, announcing the adoption and effective date, was published in the Maryland Register on March 20, 2026.

Effective Date of the Changes

March 30, 2026.