

BLUE CRABS — Coastal Bays Commercial Crab Pot Limit

What is being considered?

The department is considering clarifying the 300-crab pot limit in Maryland's Coastal Bays COMAR 08.02.03.07D(6). Currently, the regulation states not more than 300 pots per day may be set or fished. The department is proposing to remove "per day" from this statement, to be clear that the total number of pots a license holder should have in the water in this region at any time is 300 pots.

Why is this change necessary?

The intention of the regulation was to limit pots in Maryland's coastal bays of the Atlantic Ocean and their tidal tributaries, given the size of the water bodies, to avoid gear saturation and overharvesting of the resource. The higher pot limits (i.e., 600 and 900 pot permits were intended to be utilized in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries; the higher limits were not intended to be used in the Atlantic Ocean and the coastal bays. Allowing crabbers to maximize the gear permitted by their license in Maryland's coastal bays of the Atlantic Ocean and their tidal tributaries would likely lead to gear saturation and overharvesting in these waters.

Who will this affect?

It will affect commercial crabbers who crab in Maryland's coastal bays of the Atlantic Ocean and their tidal tributaries.

When will this be effective?

The department expects this change to be effective by spring 2023; however, the exact date cannot be determined. The department will follow our normal scoping and proposal procedures.

Has this change been discussed with advisory commissions?

The change was discussed at the July 2022 meetings of the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission and the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission. Both commissions recommended moving forward with scoping.