



Improving Recreational Blue Swimmer Crab Fishing Experiences on the West Coast

Purpose

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) is reviewing the rules for recreational blue swimmer crab fishing in the West Coast bioregion to ensure that fishers continue to have enjoyable and sustainable recreational fishing experiences.

Current Management

In 2018, in response to several years of decreased recreational and commercial blue swimmer crab catch, DPIRD reviewed the management of all South West blue swimmer crab fisheries. The aim of the review was to provide greater protection of the breeding stock, particularly to mated pre-spawned females.

As a result, in 2019 a new suite of recreational fishing rules was introduced, including:

- A 3-month breeding closure (1 September to 30 November) for the waters between Fremantle and south of Bunbury including the Swan/Canning Rivers, Peel/Harvey Estuary and Leschenault Inlet.
- A bag limit reduction within the Swan and Canning Rivers to 5 crabs per person, per day, with a boat limit of 20 crabs (when 4 or more Recreational Fishing Boat Licensed fishers are on board).

- A bag limit of 10 crabs in Geographe Bay, of which a maximum of 5 may be female, and a boat limit of 20 crabs (maximum of 10 females).

In 2024, following an extended closure period, Cockburn Sound and Owen Anchorage were reopened to recreational crabbing. During this process, bag limits were changed to mirror those in the Swan and Canning Rivers (bag limit to 5 and boat limit to 20). This bag limit was precautionary as the fishery had been closed for over a decade.

Together, these actions are considered to have adequately protected blue swimmer crabs within the West Coast bioregion. This has been reflected in stable harvest rates since 2019.

Why are we reviewing the rules in the West Coast bioregion?

Improving recreational fishing experiences

New crabbing arrangements have protected blue swimmer crab stocks and DPIRD assessments show they remain sustainable, however the current crabbing rules are complex, making it difficult for recreational fishers to know how many crabs they can catch, and when they can and cannot catch them.

Research and compliance undertaken by DPIRD indicate that:

- Most crabs are undersized when recreational fishing opens on 1 December.
- People are catching smaller crabs than they have in the past.
- Some people are keeping undersize crabs and exceeding their bag limit, especially at the start of the season.

Fishers have expressed that this has impacted on the quality of their fishing experiences, particularly in the Peel Harvey Estuary. It also has the potential to reduce the effectiveness of the rules in protecting crab stocks as a result of the retention of both undersized crabs or more crabs than the bag and boat limits permit.

Giving crabs the chance to moult to legal size before the season starts

DPIRD research scientists monitor blue swimmer crab stocks in key estuaries and embayments, including Cockburn Sound and the Peel Harvey Estuary.

Through this monitoring we have identified that male crabs in the south-west of Western Australia (WA) moult to legal size from December into January. Their carapace then hardens over the next few weeks before females moult from February into March and mating occurs.

This means that many crabs have not yet moulted to legal size by 1 December and that fishers within the West Coast bioregion are more likely to encounter undersized crabs at the start of the season.

Why aren't we changing the rules elsewhere in the State?

Blue swimmer crabs in WA are managed as two main stocks – a northern stock and a south-west stock. The crabs in the West Coast bioregion are part of the south-west stock.

Most recreational blue swimmer crab fishing occurs in the West Coast bioregion, particularly in areas which are close to metropolitan and regional centres with large populations, such as Peel Harvey and the Swan Canning River.

More limited recreational blue swimmer crab fishing occurs on the south and north coasts. There is no evidence to suggest that these stocks are under excessive fishing pressure and fishers continue to report good quality fishing experiences. As such, there is no need to review the rules that apply outside of the West Coast bioregion.

Proposed New West Coast bioregion recreational crabbing rules

DPIRD is proposing to:

- Standardise recreational bag and boat limits for blue swimmer crab in the West Coast bioregion. This would make it easier for the public to make sure they are doing the right thing.
- Implement measures to increase protection for undersize crabs that are yet to moult to legal size. We hope this will improve fishing experiences by increasing the likelihood of catching legal sized crabs.

Proposed New bag and boat limits for the West Coast bioregion (WCB)

WCB bag limit



WCB boat limit



With two or more
Recreational Fishing
Boat licensed fishers
on board

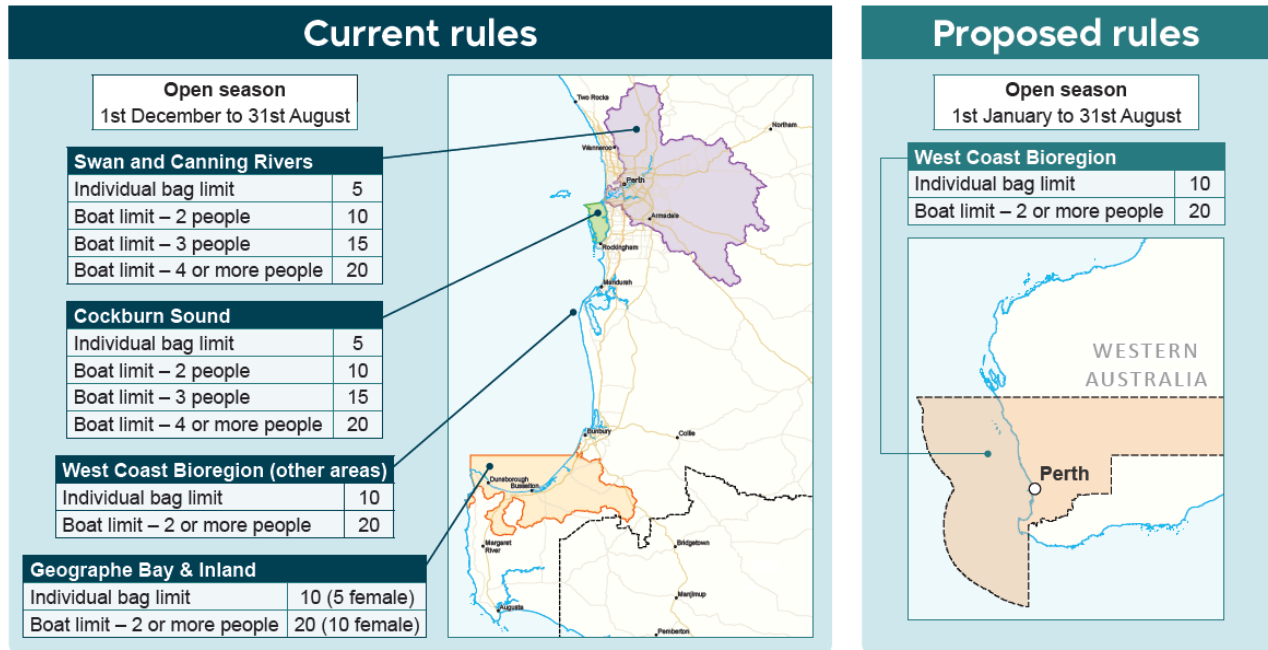
Shifting the season

Extending the current crab fishing closure, from Swan Canning rivers to Minninup Beach – south of Bunbury, until **31 December** would give crabs the opportunity to undergo an additional moult, meaning there would be a higher likelihood of fishers catching legal sized crabs when the season opens.

Have Your Say

Have Your Say on the proposed changes to recreational blue swimmer crab rules in the West Coast bioregion.

The public consultation period for the recreational blue swimmer crab review is open from 13 March until 15 April 2026. Make sure you submit your feedback via the Have Your Say platform by **5pm on 15 April 2026**.



Note: Crabbing rules (seasons, bag limits, and boat limits) in the North Coast, Gascoyne Coast and South Coast bioregions will remain the same.

Next Steps

Your feedback will inform our advice to the Minister for Fisheries regarding any changes to the recreational crab fishing rules in WA.

We anticipate that any changes would be implemented prior to the Summer 2026/27 crabbing season in the West Coast bioregion.