

Live Mud Crab Grading Scheme



Background to the Live Mud Crab Grading Scheme

Mud crabs provide a valuable commercial fishery in Australia and generate at least \$100 million in retail and restaurant sales every year. They are also a highly prized recreational catch and a source of food for many indigenous Australians. From a commercial perspective, many people are involved in the process of putting a mud crab on the consumer's plate – from catchers to transport operators to wholesalers to retailers to restaurant chefs. Most mud crabs travel to their final point of sale alive and the quality of the crab at its final destination has a major impact on price and desirability.

Historically, there have been different interpretations of quality grading between crabbers and wholesalers across Australia. What make a "top quality" mud crab and importantly what constitutes a "poor quality" crab has been open to a wide range of personal views and this has impacted on revenue and relationships

throughout the supply chain. Through two Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) projects and via Industry comment this has been identified as a major problem.

With the support of FRDC a forum was held to develop a national system to ensure catchers, buyers and marketers had a consistent, workable grading system for the entire industry – from trap to plate. The forum, "Using Industry Expertise to Build a National System for Grading of Live Mud Crabs" brought together people from throughout the supply chain and from across Australia to develop this industry-driven, objective and mutually-agreed Australian minimum standards for a national grading system for live mud crabs. The decision chart developed by the group provides all people throughout the supply chain with an easy to use guide to the Australian Grading Scheme for live mud crabs.

Each jurisdiction has different rules on the taking of mud crab – make sure you know your local rules.

Key handling recommendations for crabbers

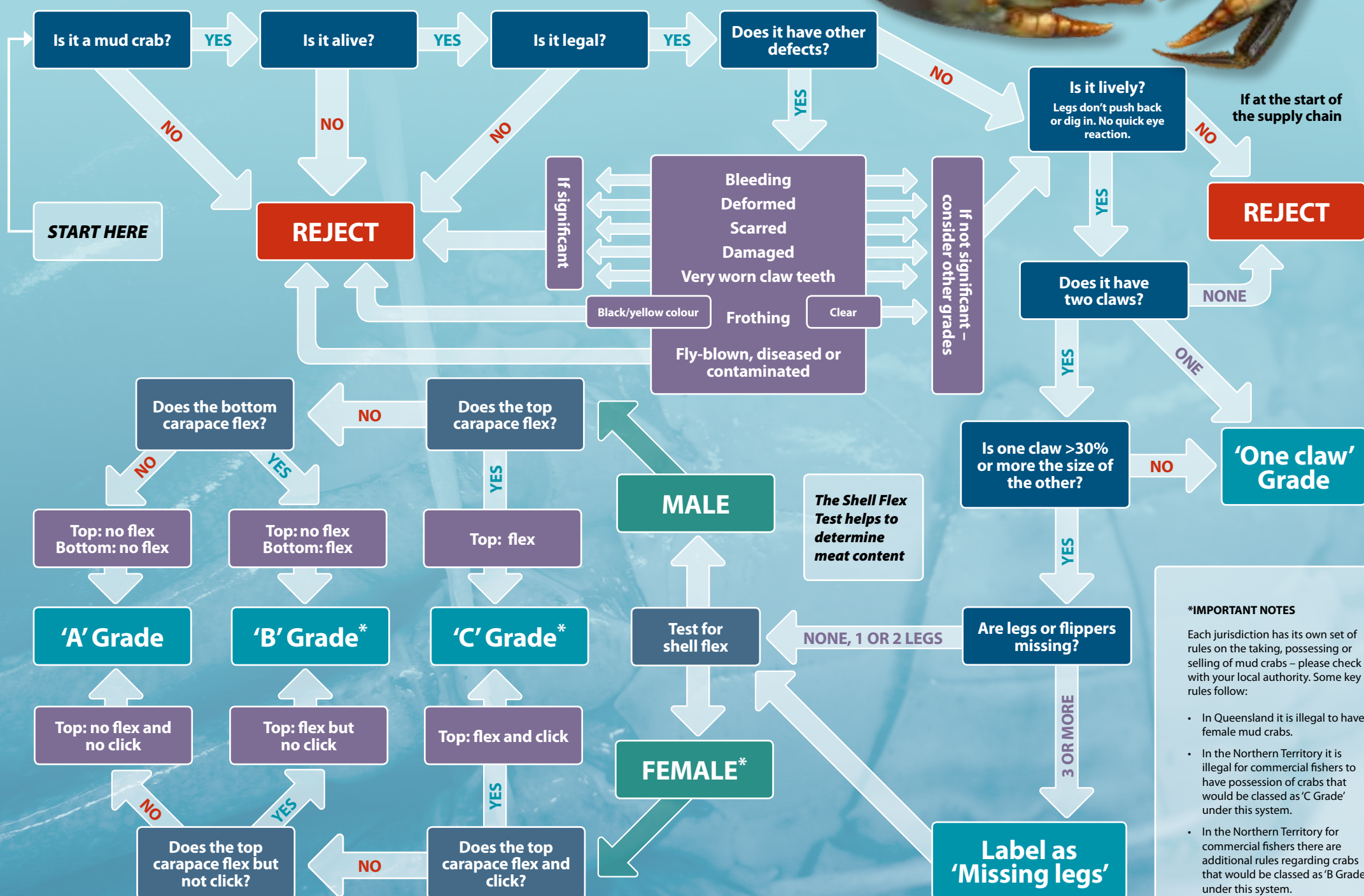
After you have confirmed that your crab is the legal size and complies with sex and other controls as per state and territory regulations, research has shown the following tips will help keep your live muddies in the best condition:

- Tie claws hard against the body as soon as possible – if you can, or ensure crabs can't injure each other
- If keeping crabs alive, hold them in clean, damp, insect proof, hessian-lined and covered crates
- Keep the temperature constant
- Avoid direct sunlight, wind or breeze
- Limit any loud noises, vibrations or impacts
- Disturb the crabs as little as possible and handle gently.

Mud crabs must change their shell to grow to a larger size – this is called moulting. Recently moulted crabs have softer, thinner shells with little meat inside, but lots of fluid – these are often called empty crabs. If these crabs are returned to the water at point of capture, over a relatively short time of 2 to 4 weeks, as the crab feeds that fluid transforms to juicy and succulent meat.



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***IMPORTANT NOTES**

Each jurisdiction has its own set of rules on the taking, possessing or selling of mud crabs – please check with your local authority. Some key rules follow:

- In Queensland it is illegal to have female mud crabs.
- In the Northern Territory it is illegal for commercial fishers to have possession of crabs that would be classed as 'C Grade' under this system.
- In the Northern Territory for commercial fishers there are additional rules regarding crabs that would be classed as 'B Grade' under this system.



The Australian Industry Live Mud Crab Grading Scheme was developed by the National Mud Crab Industry Reference Group.

This project was supported by the Australian Government through the Fisheries Research Development Corporation (FRDC) under FRDC project 2011/225 *'Using Industry Expertise to Build a National System for Grading of Live Mud Crabs'*.

The project was only possible through the attendance, participation and input of industry members at the Forum, who now comprise the National Mud Crab Industry Reference Group, C-AID Consultants, Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF Qld), OceanWatch with logistical support from Sydney Fish Market.

A video showing how to undertake the grading, electronic copies of the brochure and other information will be available at the following websites:

C-AID Consultants
www.c-aid.com.au

DAFF Qld
www.daff.qld.gov.au/food

Sydney Fish Market
www.sydneyfishmarket.com.au

OceanWatch
www.oceanwatch.org.au