

Alive and kicking

Recovery procedures – steps to increase longevity of live mud crabs

The Queensland Government has developed best practice guidelines for the handling and storage of live mud crabs from harvest to table. These guidelines were developed as a way to reduce the stress levels of muddies, decrease mortality after harvest and to increase the eating quality of the catch.

This fact sheet provides information on a recovery step for live mud crabs. Mud crabs stored for more than five days are more likely to die. If they survive, these crabs are liable to be poor eating quality. A recovery step can reduce mortalities and loss of quality by eliminating the crabs waste and toxins.

You will need

- Fresh, clean sea water, bore water, town water or rain water at around 25°C.
- 1:10 ratio of live crab weight to water, for example 1kg crab + 10 litres of water.
- Aeration to create fine bubbles.

Before recovery

- Make sure crabs and water are about the same temperature.
- Sort crabs - badly damaged, very slow or frothing crabs should be killed and cooked. These crabs will not survive further transportation.
- Gently clean/rinse crabs of excessive mud, faeces or other contaminants. Ensure crabs are well tied.
- Isolate damaged or bleeding crabs, blood in the recovery water will increase animal aggression during purge.

Recovery procedure

1. Aerate the water. Without fine bubble aeration of water, all oxygen is depleted within 15 mins and crabs will die.



2. Immerse crabs individually – hold with flippers down and mouth just under water. Hold crab until water starts flowing over the gills and out of the mouth. This is important as crabs risk drowning if dumped in water without releasing trapped air and allowing gill action to start.

Some crabs will go upside down and this is fine as long as air has been released.

3. If crab can not pump water across gills after 2 mins, then recovery is not possible.
4. Immerse for 3 hours. No shorter, no longer.
5. Return crabs to damp hessian lined crates, store at 18°C to 25°C. Be aware that air-conditioning and the cooling effect of damp hessian can drop temperature by another 5°C. This can stress crabs.
6. Recovery water is high in ammonia after treatment. Dispose of water by following appropriate local regulations.

More information

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