

## Tie Me Muddie Up Tight, Sport How to land, handle, tie and store your mud crab

M. Grubert and M. Phelan, Coastal Research Unit, Fisheries, Darwin

### LANDING AND HANDLING MUD CRABS

So you have caught yourself a mud crab – now what? The first challenge is to get it out of the pot. If the crab is reluctant to exit, you may need to tilt and shake the pot. Once the crab is free, it is important to get it under control as soon as possible because prolonged handling aggravates the crab and increases the chance of injury. Most crabbers use a length of metal or timber to restrain the animal. When attempting to pick up a mud crab, move in quickly from behind, place your index finger on the top of the shell (in the safe zone) and hold the last pair of legs (see Figure 1).

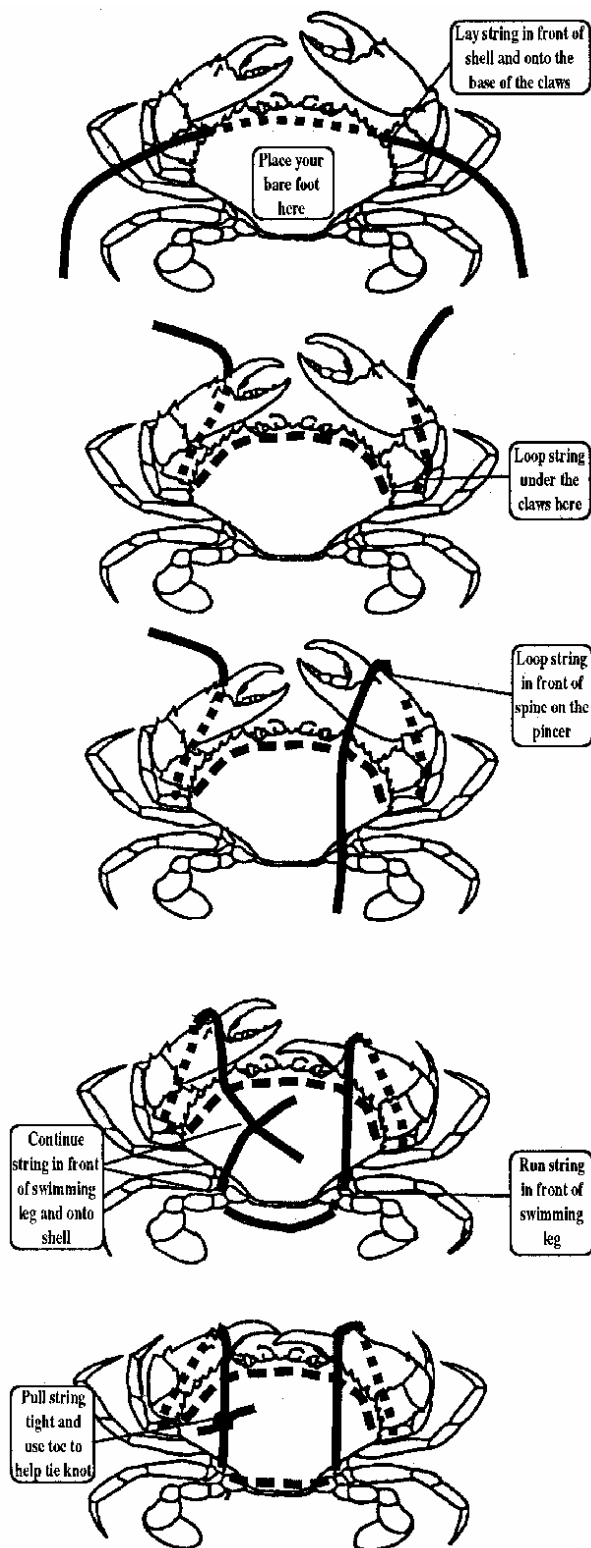


**Figure 1.** Recommended way to hold an untied mud crab

If the mud crab grabs anything while it is being handled, let it go, otherwise it may drop a claw. If you are bitten by a mud crab, do not try to pull the claw off - break the pincer with a heavy, blunt object. Also be aware that the sharp spines on the edge of the shell can cut you. Check that each crab is above the recreational minimum size limit (i.e. 130 mm for males and 140 mm for females) and is not 'berried'; otherwise you must return the crab to the water as soon as possible (see Fishnote 24 'So You Want to Catch Crabs'). Crabs with a soft shell should also be returned to the water (see Fishnote 28 'Mud Crabs - Running on Empty?').

### TYING AND STORING MUD CRABS

Before you tie your mud crab you will need a flat, clear area, 60-80 cm of string and at least one of your feet bare. Place your bare foot firmly on the back of the crab and get a good grip with your toes (shoes make it difficult to judge the correct pressure and you will need your toes later to help in tying). You are now free to use both hands to tie the crab, using Figure 2 as a guide. Once your crab is tied, wrap it in a damp cloth or hessian bag, which will assist in retaining water and keep flies off, then place in a self-draining container. Storing your crabs in a moist, shady place will keep them alive for several days before they are cooked.



**Figure 2.** How to tie a mud crab

1. Cut a 60-80 cm piece of string. Hold the string with your hands 20 cm apart, on either side of the centre. Place your bare foot on the shell of the mud crab and lay the string in front of the shell and over the base of the claws.
2. Move your hands to the ends of the string and draw it back, looping it under the base of the claws and out to the front of the crab.
3. Loop the string back over the base of the pincer, in front of the spines and firmly draw the claw against the shell. You will find it easier to do one claw at a time.
4. Bring both ends of the string back over the shell. Take one end down in front of a swimming leg and by lifting your heel guide the string underneath the other swimming leg and then up in front of it onto the shell of the mud crab.
5. Pull the ends of the string as tight as possible, ensuring the claws are hard up against the shell. Tie a reef knot on top of the shell using your big toe to hold it tight while you finish it off.

Please visit us at our website:

[www.nt.gov.au/dpifm](http://www.nt.gov.au/dpifm)