

Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment



Matthew Rodriguez
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Edmund G. Brown Jr.
Governor

MEMORANDUM

TO: Charlton H. Bonham, Director
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FROM: Lauren Zeise, Ph.D.
Acting Director 

DATE: May 2, 2016

SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATION ON OPENING OF DUNGENESS CRAB FISHERY
IN STATE WATERS BETWEEN THE CALIFORNIA/OREGON BORDER
AND 41° 17.60' N LATITUDE

The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) has determined, in consultation with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), that consumption of Dungeness crab taken from state waters between the California/Oregon border and 41° 17.60' N Latitude (a line extending due west from the mouth of Redwood Creek, Humboldt County) does not pose a significant threat for domoic acid exposure. This determination is based on data from repeated sampling of Dungeness crab taken from California waters and analysis of these samples by CDPH laboratories.

Domoic acid poisoning in humans may occur within minutes to hours after consumption of affected seafood and can result in signs and symptoms ranging from vomiting and diarrhea to permanent loss of short-term memory (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning), coma, or death. The current federal action levels for domoic acid in Dungeness crab are 20 parts per million (ppm) in the body meat and 30 ppm in the viscera. Levels of domoic acid in viscera samples of Dungeness crab taken from state waters between the California/Oregon border and 41° 17.60' N Latitude do not exceed the action level of 30 ppm. OEHHA, in consultation with CDPH, finds that consumption of Dungeness crab taken from these areas does not pose a significant human health risk from high levels

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of domoic acid. As such, OEHHA recommends the opening of the Dungeness crab fishery in these areas – in a manner consistent with the emergency regulations adopted by the Fish and Game Commission and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) on November 5 and 6, 2015, respectively.

OEHHA and CDPH recommend that people not eat the crab viscera – that is the internal organs, also known as “butter” or “guts” of crabs. We are also recommending that water or broth used to cook crabs be discarded and not used to prepare dishes such as sauces, broths, soups, or stews. The viscera usually contain much higher levels of domoic acid than crab body meat. When whole crabs are cooked in liquid, domoic acid may leach from the viscera into the cooking liquid. This recommendation is intended to avoid harm in the unlikely event that some crabs taken from an open fishery have elevated levels of domoic acid. These recommendations will be provided in an advisory on domoic acid in crab being released concurrently by CDPH today.

Monitoring and analysis by CDFW, CDPH, and OEHHA of Dungeness and rock crabs in areas that remain closed are continuing to determine when the crab fisheries in these areas can safely be opened.

If you have questions, please contact me at Lauren.Zeise@oehha.ca.gov or (916) 322-6325.

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