



~California Dungeness Crab Task Force~

<http://www.opc.ca.gov/2009/04/dungeness-crab-task-force/>

Date: November 9, 2015

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Cc: California Dungeness Crab Task Force
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From: Dungeness Crab Task Force Executive Committee

Re: Dungeness crab domoic acid fishery impacts and next steps

On November 4, 2015, the California Department of Public Health issued a public health advisory warning due to the detection of high levels of domoic acid in California Dungeness crab. The advisory was followed by a recommendation from the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) to close the California Dungeness crab fisheries. On November 5, 2015 the California Fish and Game Commission delayed the opening of the recreational Dungeness crab fishery; it is anticipated the Director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife will delay the opening of the commercial Dungeness crab fishery prior to November 15, 2015.

In response to this, the California Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF) Executive Committee has developed the following guidance to inform and advise the Department of Public Health, OEHHA, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Fish and Game Commission (collectively referred to as “the agencies”) as this issue continues to be addressed. The DCTF Executive Committee is committed to working with the agencies to ensure a safe product is available for public consumption.

Domoic Acid Testing Protocol

In a recent [memo](#), OEHHA stated crabs will likely be tested “at each of the sampling locations... collected at least seven days apart.” Considering domoic acid levels do not appear to be dropping at a rapid pace (i.e. samples taken at a six week interval show no reduction in domoic acid levels), the Executive Committee suggests testing occur at two week intervals until the average viscera of Dungeness crab samples statewide is 60ppm (or another value deemed appropriate by the public health agencies). Once levels in the viscera reach 60ppm, testing frequency should be increased to at least every 7 days, as suggested by OEHHA.

Since many ports have overlapping fishing grounds, the DCTF Executive Committee suggests sampling ports in clusters to increase testing efficiency. Suggested groupings include:

- Crescent City, Trinidad, and Eureka
- Fort Bragg
- Bodega Bay
- Half Moon Bay and San Francisco
- Santa Cruz and Monterey



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- Morro Bay and Avila

Reducing the frequency and number of samples until levels of domoic acid are clearly decreasing, as well as clustering ports to conduct testing, will help reduce the resource burdens to fishermen and state managed laboratories who collect and process the samples. The Executive Committee recognizes that the final decision for testing protocols rests in the hands of the Public Health Agencies and will be based on their expertise, but hope that this guidance will be considered by those agencies.

Opening Dungeness Crab Fisheries

Once domoic acid levels have fallen below health advisory levels, the DCTF Executive Committee advises that both the recreational and commercial fisheries be opened statewide, rather than by county, district, management area, etc. This would prevent potentially harmful crabs from being accidentally consumed by the unknowing consumer or uninformed sportsman. If the recreational fishery is opened immediately following a green light from the Department of Public Health and OEEHA, the commercial fishery should reopen no more than one week after the recreational fishery, following annual crab quality testing as per the [Tri-State Agreement](#). The Executive Committee understands that in the unlikely event that crab quality testing results in poor yields, districts 6, 7, 8, and 9 could be delayed more than one week after the opening of the recreational fishery. Although the Executive Committee discussed options for a statewide commercial presoak time, no specific guidance was provided and the decision for establishment of the presoak time prior to the commercial opener(s) is up to the discretion of the Director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The DCTF Executive Committee may suggest an alternative to a statewide opener should one area continue to test poorly after most areas within the range of the Dungeness crab fishery test out of domoic acid advisory levels.

DCTF Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is a subcommittee of the [DCTF](#) composed of a crab processor and commercial fishermen from Morro Bay, Half Moon Bay, San Francisco, Fort Bragg, Eureka, and Crescent City. There are no recreational or commercial passenger fishing vessel (CPFV) representatives on the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee cannot make decisions on behalf of the full DCTF. However, due to the sensitive timing of this topic, on October 26, 2015 the Executive Committee was directed to provide guidance to the agencies on this topic. For more information about the Executive Committee and the DCTF please visit the DCTF webpage: <http://www.opc.ca.gov/2009/04/dungeness-crab-task-force/>. Please direct any questions regarding this memorandum to the DCTF Administrative Team at info@dungenesscrabtaskforce.com or (805) 845-9852.