

Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment



Matthew Rodriguez
Secretary for
Environmental Protection

Lauren Zeise, Ph.D., Acting Director

Headquarters • 1001 I Street • Sacramento, California 95814

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 4010 • Sacramento, California 95812-4010

Oakland Office • Mailing Address: 1515 Clay Street, 16th Floor • Oakland, California 94612



Edmund G. Brown Jr.
Governor

MEMORANDUM

TO: Charlton H. Bonham, Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
1416 Ninth Street, 12th Floor
Sacramento, California 95814

Valerie Termini, Executive Director
California Fish and Game Commission
P.O. Box 944209
Sacramento, California 94244-2090

FROM: Lauren Zeise, Ph.D. 
Acting Director

DATE: July 6, 2016

SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATION ON OPENING OF ROCK CRAB FISHERY IN
PORTIONS OF SAN MATEO COUNTY

The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) has determined, in consultation with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), that consumption of rock crab taken from state waters (three nautical miles from shore) south of 37°11' N Latitude, near Pigeon Point in San Mateo County, no longer poses a significant threat for domoic acid exposure.

Areas north of 37° 11' N Latitude to the Oregon border remain closed to rock crabbing. This determination is based on data from repeated sampling of rock 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 level for domoic acid in Dungeness crab is 30 ppm in the viscera. OEHHA and CDPH are using this action level for rock crabs. In contrast to levels seen earlier, levels of domoic acid in recent viscera samples of rock crab caught from state waters near Pigeon Point in areas that were previously closed (north of 36° 58.72' N) did not test above the action level of 30 parts per million (ppm).

California Environmental Protection Agency

Sacramento: (916) 324-7572 Oakland: (510) 622-3200

www.oehha.ca.gov

Charlton H. Bonham and Valerie Termini

July 6, 2016

Page 2

OEHHA, in consultation with CDPH, now finds that consumption of rock crab taken from these areas does not pose a significant human health risk from high levels of domoic acid. As such, OEHHA recommends the opening of the rock 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.

Sampling results for rock crab caught in waters near Pigeon Point that were previously closed, as well as areas further north, are provided in the table below.

OEHHA and CDPH are advising that people not eat the crab viscera – 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 of rock crabs in areas that remain closed are continuing by CDFW, CDPH, and OEHHA to determine when the rock crab fishery in these areas can safely be opened.

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

cc: Matthew Rodriguez
Secretary for Environmental Protection
California Environmental Protection Agency
1001 I Street
Sacramento, California 95814

Karen L. Smith, Director
California Department of Public Health
1615 Capitol Avenue, Suite 720
Sacramento, California 95899-7377

Domoic Acid in Rock Crab Caught in Waters Near Pigeon Point and Areas Further North

PORT	SAMPLE COLLECTION DATE	NUMBER OF SAMPLES	VISCERA SAMPLE RESULTS: RANGE	AVERAGE LEVEL IN VISCERA	SAMPLES EXCEEDING ACTION LEVEL (30 ppm in viscera)
Eureka: Humboldt Bay	4/24/16	6	<2.5-71	12	17%
Bodega Bay	4/26/16	5	3.3-160	84	80%
	5/3/16	6	10-87	30	17%
	6/7/16	6	8.1-160	42	33%
Half Moon Bay: Pillar Point	5/21/16	12	<2.5-50	11	8%
	6/11/16	6	<2.5-43	21	33%
	6/17/16	12	<2.5-48	12	8%
Half Moon Bay: Pigeon Point	4/23/16	6	<2.5-16	5	0%
	5/6/16	6	2.5-45	13	17%
	5/21/16	6	2.6-16	7	0%
	6/11/16	6	5.4-23	12	0%