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CDFW lifts fishery closure from Refugio Beach Oil Spill: Fishing resumes

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. - The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) lifted the fishing closure in Santa Barbara County on June 29, following official notification from the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) that there is no longer a human health threat present in finfish and shellfish from oil chemicals in the Refugio Beach oil spill incident.

Fishing may resume in the 138 square-mile area from Canada de Alegeria at the western edge to Coal Oil Point at the eastern edge in accordance with state and federal ocean fishing regulations. The U.S. Coast Guard had already lifted the marine safety exclusion zone on June 19.

“We are so glad to announce some good news that is a step towards recovering from this tragic oil spill,” said Charlton Bonham, CDFW director. “Fishing may resume!”

Scientists from OEHHA and CDFW, with the assistance of local commercial fishermen, collected a broader range of finfish, shellfish, kelp and invertebrates to evaluate the exposure of these fisheries to oil chemicals. Finfish species sampled included sand dab, barred surf perch, kelp rockfish, black and yellow rockfish, vermilion rockfish, bocaccio rockfish, grass rockfish, and mackerel. Invertebrates sampled included red sea urchin, mussels, warty sea cucumber, giant red cucumber, brown rock crab, yellow rock crab, sheep crab, ridgeback prawn, and spiny lobster. OEHHA worked with the laboratories to turn sample results around as quickly as possible. Recreational angling and commercial fishing leadership in the Santa Barbara area asked CDFW for the broader sampling and faster turn-around on results.

“Getting sustainable Santa Barbara seafood back in the market was important,” said Thomas M. Cullen, Administrator for the Office of Spill Prevention and Response. “Combined with the re-opening of El Capitan State Beach, this is great news for the Santa Barbara area.”

California law requires that OEHHA evaluate the potential human health risks associated with eating seafood from areas where an oil spill occurs. On May 19, Line 901 belonging to Plains Pipeline, LLC ruptured spilling crude oil onto land that reached the ocean at Refugio Beach. Consequently, based on recommendations from OEHHA, CDFW initiated a fishery closure on May 19 and an extension of closure boundaries on May 21. Today’s action lifts the closure.

While fishing may resume, OEHHA reminds the public that the annual quarantine of sport-harvesting mussels is currently in effect to protect the public from paralytic shellfish poisoning and domoic acid poisoning.

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*This is the fourth year of California's **drought**. To learn about all the actions the state has taken to manage our water system and cope with the impacts of the drought, please visit drought.ca.gov.*

*Every Californian should take steps to **conserve water**. Find out how at saveourwater.com.*

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