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Update on Biotxin Management in the California Commercial Dungeness Crab Fishery

Management of biotoxins in the California commercial Dungeness crab fishery is a collaborative effort between the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), California Department of Public Health (CDPH), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department). The Department's role in biotoxin management is to facilitate domoic acid testing and open/close the fishery based on health agency recommendations (Section 5523 of the Fish and Game Code). The Department coordinates sample collections by commercial fishermen prior to the scheduled season start date for submission to the CDPH laboratory. If OEHHA, in consultation with CDPH, determines that any species of fish is likely to pose a human health risk they will recommend area closures to the Director of Fish and Wildlife. Once a health risk no longer exists, health agencies can recommend the lifting of those closures or delay of openings.

The Department participated in several discussions with OEHHA and CDPH to determine if area closure boundaries could be pre-established based on the 17 sites that have been consistently sampled for domoic acid from prior seasons. As a result of those discussions, OEHHA and CDPH identified eight (8) "Biotxin Management Areas" (BMAs) between the California/Oregon border and the California/Mexico border.

BMAs considered number of sampling locations within a given area, geographic extent of an area, access to neighboring port areas, boundaries used in prior seasons, or boundaries proposed under new regulations (i.e., Department's Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program or RAMP, Section 132.8, Title 14, CA Code of Regulations). Designating pre-established boundary areas will build more predictability and consistency from season to season and help the fleet prepare for any season delays based on current test results.

California Domoic Acid Testing Protocol:

1. All 17 locations will be sampled prior to the scheduled season start date.
2. Vessels are required to carry an electronic monitoring device that allows CDFW to access location data during sampling trip and participating vessel skippers must maintain chain of custody using California Department of Public Health documentation.
3. Number of crab sampled per location is 6 crab with 3 from >30 fathoms and 3 from <30 fathoms.

4. Locations with all crab collected on the first round resulting in ≤ 30 ppm for domoic acid concentration will not be re-tested.
5. If a location initially tested has any crab results above 30 ppm, then two consecutive sets of crab samples must be collected from that location at least a week apart and result in all crab from both sets at ≤ 30 ppm domoic acid concentration in order for the location to clear.
6. All locations within a Biotoxin Management Area need to pass domoic acid testing criteria (steps 3-5).
7. Timeline for notification of delays/closure and opening areas/lifting of closures will follow procedures as stipulated in Section 5523 of the Fish and Game Code.