

## **NEWS RELEASE**

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

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### **Commercial crab fishing delayed again on Washington's south coast**

OLYMPIA – The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is again delaying the commercial Dungeness crab fishery on a small section of Washington's southern coast.

The decision was made in coordination with shellfish managers from Oregon and California, where commercial Dungeness fisheries also remain closed.

Although test results in crab from Washington's southern coast show the crab are safe to eat, results from California and sections of Oregon indicate elevated levels of domoic acid, a natural toxin produced by certain types of marine algae.

Washington shellfish managers agreed to extend the delay of the southern coast fishery to avoid the chaos that opening such a small area would create, said Dan Ayres, coastal shellfish manager for WDFW.

Typically, Washington, Oregon and California coordinate commercial Dungeness fishery openings to prevent too many crabbers from concentrating in small areas and ensure smoothly-run fisheries.

"If open, this 13-mile stretch of Washington's south coast would be the only area in Washington, Oregon or California open to non-tribal commercial crabbing," Ayres said. "We're worried it would draw too many crabbers to the area and potentially be over-fished."

Washington's commercial fishery includes the area from the Columbia River north to Klipsan Beach on the Long Beach Peninsula and the waters inside Willapa Bay.

WDFW previously delayed the fishery's Dec. 1 opening to conduct additional testing on crabs for domoic acid, which has plagued shellfish fisheries this year along the West Coast. Extensive testing on southern coast crab continues to show that domoic acid levels are below the health-safety threshold set by state public health officials.

Later this month, shellfish managers from all three states again will discuss an opening date for commercial Dungeness crab fisheries.

However, WDFW plans to open the area north of Klipsan Beach to state commercial crabbing on Jan. 4, in coordination with tribal co-managers. Crab coming into the market from tribal fisheries currently open along the central and northern Washington coast have been tested and are safe, Ayres said.

Recreational crabbing is open in all of Washington's coastal waters and in Puget Sound, where marine toxins in crab have not been a problem.

Domoic acid can be harmful or even fatal if consumed in sufficient quantities. Cooking or freezing does not destroy the toxin in shellfish.

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