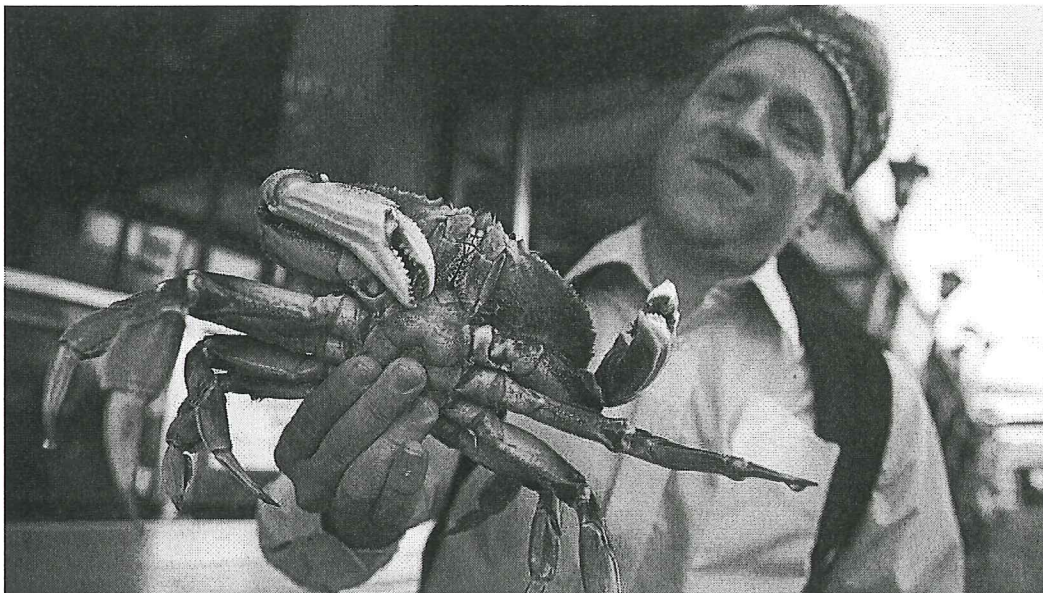


NEWSELA

# Empty crab pots, empty wallets: Toxin's presence delays crustacean harvest

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.22.15

Word Count **810** 6



Michael Bair, of Lexington, Kentucky, holds an imported Dungeness crab at Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, California, Nov. 10, 2015. Photo: AP/Eric Risberg

Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, California, is typically much busier this time of year. Workers should be preparing to haul in millions of pounds of Dungeness crab. The crustacean is a tradition for many at Thanksgiving and other holiday meals.

But crab pots are sitting empty, and boats are docked. California delayed the Nov. 15 start of its crab season after finding dangerous levels of a poison in crabs. Officials in Oregon and Washington state are testing crab samples and will decide soon whether they will open their crab season on Dec. 1 as planned.

Meanwhile, fishermen anxiously wait for authorities to give them the go-ahead to start fishing.

Fishing companies usually earn the most money this time of year. But a massive increase of microscopic algae in the Pacific Ocean, called a bloom, is threatening the crab industry. The algae produces a natural toxin, or poison, called domoic acid, which is harmful to wildlife and fish.

### **Coastal Crabbers Anxiously Wait**

Closing the entire West Coast to crabbing would be a blow to the crab industry. Nearly \$170 million worth of Dungeness crab was caught in 2014.

"Everybody is counting on crab to make it, so this is pretty disappointing," said Larry Collins, president of the San Francisco Crab Boat Owners Association. "Whenever they test clean, we'll go get them. I'm very hopeful that it's sooner than later."

Experts say that warm water created the conditions for the toxic algae. Although not attributed by climate change, it could offer a picture of what's to come as ocean temperatures are expected to warm. Already, warmer ocean temperatures off New England have shaken up fisheries there. It has contributed to the collapse of the region's cod fish population. It also caused the lobster population to move north, studies have found.

"I don't have a crystal ball, but I think we're being given a warning here," said Vera Trainer, who manages the marine biotoxin program at the Northwest Fisheries Science Center in Seattle, Washington. "We're being shown what the future is going to look like. This is more of what we can expect."

### **Razor Clams Fall Victim To Toxin**

Razor clams, for now, have been taken off menus in Oregon and Washington. People are not being allowed to dig for clams because they also have dangerous levels of domoic acid. The cost: an estimated \$22 million in lost spending by tourists, said Dan Ayres. He is the coastal shellfish manager for the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Matt Hunter is a shellfish project leader with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. He said that crabbing is huge in the state. If fishermen are not allowed to catch crabs, it will affect how much money people make in the state and damage the economy.

Crab can still be found in many restaurants and stores, and health officials say crabs sold in stores are safe to eat. Some crabs on the market now may have been caught months ago and frozen for later. Large-scale crab fishing is currently going on in some parts of Alaska, Oregon and Washington.

### **Holding Out Hope But Ready For Disappointment**

In California, crab fishermen are bracing for a tough season.

"Needless to say, this is devastating," said Steve Fitz, who owns Mr. Morgan Fisheries in Half Moon Bay. Crab sales make up much of the annual income for many in the fishing community, he said. Still, he is hopeful that toxin levels will go down and the crab season will open soon.

"It's a disappointment because we really look forward to it every November," said Matt Watson, manager of Woodhouse Fish Co. in San Francisco. Watson said the company will try to buy whole crab at a reasonable price from other states.

Kris Ducker, who grew up in California, looks forward to her family's holiday tradition. They eat crab served ice cold, with bread on the side. Even though she now lives in Texas, she still tries to find fresh Dungeness crab.

### **All I Want For Christmas Is Crab**

"We're looking forward to having Dungeness crab for Christmas Eve. We could move on to something else. It wouldn't kill us, but we would be sad," she said.

Scientists say the warm waters that led to the toxic algae should not last long.

However, climate change models predict warming along the coastlines over the next several decades. "This type of event probably is going to become much more frequent in the future," said Mark Wells. He is an oceanography professor at the University of Maine.

On the Northeast coast, marine species are moving to different areas because of the warmer waters. It has changed what fish is caught and where.

Another study found that West Coast fish will move northward by about 20 miles every 10 years. Likewise, some species probably will disappear off the coast of California and Oregon.

## Quiz

- 1 What could be another title for the section "Coastal Crabbers Anxiously Wait"?
  - (A) "Crab Industry Crashes"
  - (B) "Climate Change Heats Up"
  - (C) "Crab Season To Start Soon"
  - (D) "A Warning About The Future"
  
- 2 Which detail BEST supports a central idea of the article?
  - (A) Kris Ducker, who grew up in California, looks forward to her family's holiday tradition. They eat crab served ice cold, with bread on the side. Even though she now lives in Texas, she still tries to find fresh Dungeness crab.
  - (B) On the Northeast coast, marine species are moving to different areas because of the warmer waters. It has changed what fish is caught and where.
  - (C) Experts say that warm water created the conditions for the toxic algae. Although not attributed by climate change, it could offer a picture of what's to come as ocean temperatures are expected to warm.
  - (D) Crab can still be found in many restaurants and stores, and health officials say crabs sold in stores are safe to eat. Some crabs on the market now may have been caught months ago and frozen for later.
  
- 3 What does the article's title indicate?
  - (A) that the crabs are a source of income
  - (B) that the poison is dangerous to humans
  - (C) that the poison was caused by climate change
  - (D) that crab is becoming more expensive than ever
  
- 4 Based on the article, which of the following topics is still uncertain?
  - (A) whether crab in Alaska is poisonous
  - (B) whether climate change caused the algae problem
  - (C) whether crab in Washington is poisonous
  - (D) whether warmer ocean waters caused the algae problem