Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment

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Matthew Rodriquez
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Edmund G. Brown Jr.
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Michael Yaun, Acting Executive Director
California Fish and Game Commission
1416 Ninth Street, 12th Floor
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FROM: Lauren Zeise, Ph.D.
Acting Director

DATE: April 20, 2016

SUBJECT: DOMOIC ACID THREAT TO PUBLIC HEALTH FROM RAZOR CLAMS IN DEL NORTE AND HUMBOLDT COUNTIES

Recent test results indicate prompt action is needed to address an emergency situation involving a severe threat to public health and safety from the potential human consumption of razor clams with high levels of domoic acid.

The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) has been provided test data from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) laboratories measuring high levels of domoic acid in razor clams harvested along the coast of Del Norte and Humboldt counties (along Crescent and Clam beaches). 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 clams is 20 parts per million (ppm). Data in razor clams collected this month from the coast of Del Norte and Humboldt counties show that all but one of the samples (17 out of 18) exceeded the action level of 20 ppm. One-third of the samples were above 100 ppm.

In consultation with the Director of CDPH, OEHHA finds that consumption of razor clams is likely to pose a significant human health risk as a result of high levels of domoic acid. As such, OEHHA recommends that the razor clam fishery be closed for Del Norte and Humboldt counties.

OEHHA anticipates making a recommendation to open the fishery or lift the closure based on further domoic acid testing conducted in clams at each of the sampling locations, to include two sets of samples, collected at least seven days apart that all test under the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) action level.

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

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