Father Bernie Lindley

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Crab

This is Father Bernie Lindley from St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, for Voices.

Our local commercial Dungeness crab season opens tomorrow... except it has been delayed... as usual. I've skippered a crab boat for 27 seasons and I suspect that we have only started on time 6 or 7 times during those years.

We used to get delayed because the fishermen couldn't agree on a price with the processors. The fishermen would all stay tied to dock, waiting for a price offer that everyone could live with. Back in those days, our industry didn't have the support of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Oregon Department of Agriculture that we have now. Now days the quality of the crab has to be verified more stringently before the season can legally open than was the case in decades past. Additionally, in recent years, the crab have been affected more by a type of red tide called domoic acid than had been the case when I first started crabbing.

Domoic acid is naturally occurring and varies in concentration in different regions each year. The toxin is almost always limited to the crab's viscera (or guts) and purges out of the crab population over the course of a few weeks. There has never been a documented case of someone getting sick from domoic acid in a Dungeness crab and our industry wants to keep it that way.

This year the crab north of Cape Blanco are clear for domoic acid, but will need about an extra two weeks to fill up with meat. The crab from Cape Blanco down to Fort Bragg, California will probably need more than just two weeks to fill out and they also have slightly elevated levels of domoic acid that will need to drop.

The moral of the story is that crab season doesn't start based on a day on the calendar. Crab season starts when the crab are ready to be harvested.