



Workers at Jessie's Ilwaco Fish helped to unload thousands of pounds of crab during a late-night shift Monday.

Natalie St. John/EO Media Group

Crab kicks into gear with healthy start

Quality, quantity, prices all good

By KATIE WILSON
EO Media Group

ILWACO and CHINOOK, Wash. — It's only a few days into this year's commercial Dungeness crab season and fishermen already believe they are looking at a better run than last year.

Dan Ayres, coastal shellfish manager with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, won't have initial landing numbers for another week or so but, he said, "The word we're getting from the fleet is that it looks better than last year."

After getting the all-clear from state health departments, Oregon and Washington's commercial Dungeness crab fishermen finally hit the water Monday after being delayed for weeks due to elevated levels of the marine toxin domoic acid. The season traditionally opens Dec. 1, though it has been pushed back into January before when crabs have not reached proper size. A delay beyond Christmastime is particularly difficult for crabbing families who rely on those paychecks for holiday spending.

The toxin shut down nearly half of the Washington coastline to commercial crabbing last summer. Though the price per pound had been high and the crab looked big and healthy, landings had been few and far between through the winter and spring. When the 90-mile-long closure was announced, the season ended, abruptly, on an already low note.

The opener went smoothly off the Washington coast this week, though, according to Ayres. There were no reports of vessel accidents or other emergencies nor any reports of ille-



Dozens of bins of live crab awaited processing at Bell Buoy in the Port of Chinook Tuesday. Each of these bins, harvested on Monday, held between 500 and 600 pounds of crab.

Natalie St. John/EO Media Group



A worker at Bell Buoy moved heavy tubs of crab into the plant, for processing Tuesday.

Natalie St. John/EO Media Group

gal gear-setting. For the first time, the coastwide start time for Washington opener was shifted from midnight to 9 a.m., giving fishermen those extra hours to rest between setting their first loads of gear and then fishing.

Safety message

Though reports of high domoic acid levels — and warnings of the

deadly effects of the toxin on humans who consume contaminated seafood — filled media reports along the West Coast leading up to the opener, the industry is confident in both the safety of the crab now and consumers' desire to still eat crab.

"Most of the concerns seemed to be, 'When is it going to open and when can I buy it?'" said Hugh Link,

'The word we're getting from the fleet is that it looks better than last year.'

Dan Ayres

coastal shellfish manager with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

director of the Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission, which also helps the Oregon fleet with marketing and advertising.

Link says the issues with domoic acid and the delayed start date did not seem to complicate price negotiations in Oregon. Commercial crabbers started the season at \$2.90 per pound. Last year, the fleet started at around \$3.10 per pound, but that price quickly climbed. The average price for the 2014-15 season reached about \$4.11, but landings were low

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Taking sea lions to task

Port committee looks at options to thwart invaders

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Port of Astoria Commissioner Bill Hunsinger marshaled his fellow commercial fishermen Tuesday to talk about what the agency can do to stop sea lions from ruining fishing on the Columbia River.

Hunsinger added the Sea Lion Committee to the Port Commission agenda for the meeting Tuesday, which was packed to the gills with commercial and guide fishermen who largely feel the river's endangered salmon runs, and by extension their livelihoods, are threatened by pinnipeds. In

the front row was a small contingent from the Sea Lion Defense Brigade, a group formed several years ago to monitor hazing and other violence against sea lions in Astoria and at the Bonneville Dam, where they feed at the fish ladders.

Over the last few years, the Port has become a focal point for the

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The best present

Jail deputy has a miraculous recovery after nearly dying

By KYLE SPURR
The Daily Astorian

Doctors were prepared to pronounce Dave Hillard dead on Dec. 4, five days after the 44-year-old Clatsop County Jail deputy suffered a heart attack at his Astoria home.

The left side of Hillard's heart was dead, and doctors did not see any signs of improvement. Hillard's organs were being shopped for donation.

Just as his family started gathering to say their goodbyes, Hillard's wife, Michelle, overheard two doctors whispering to each other. One doctor came over and said they noticed activity in Hillard's heart, and that it was beginning to beat on its own.

"They had no medical explanation," Michelle Hillard said.

Hillard woke up a week later to one of his brothers asking, "Do you know who I am?" He did.

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Yogi, budtender, entrepreneur, 'Goonie'

Afrika talks about family's rough landing, escaping the corporate world

By ERICK BENGEL
The Daily Astorian

Raja Afrika's journey to Astoria was a traumatic one, something he still gets emotional about.

Though he quickly rose to a manager position at Hi Casual Cannabis Astoria — the city's newest marijuana dis-



Raja Afrika sits behind the front desk at Hi in Astoria.

Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

pensary — the 40-year-old Afrika didn't know whether his family's move from Port-

land in early October would pan out.

It all began a year ago.



Afrika, a successful computer programmer for 20 years, was working as a consultant for Benson Industries, an architectural firm that designs and installs windows in skyscrapers worldwide, including the new World Trade Center building in lower Manhattan. The company used his software to, among other things, track the inventory of parts, "so I had a hand

in that. I'm really proud of that," he said.

But when another company bought Benson, Afrika lost his job, and soon he could no longer afford his condo in Hillsdale, where he lived with his wife, Kathleen, and their 2-year-old son, Tenzin.

The couple had savings set aside, but they used much of

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