



Friday 17 October 2014

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## Bloom diagnostic test to aid shellfish industry

A new project to develop a rapid shellfish toxin screen test is underway at the University of Tasmania.

The test, using a similar platform to home pregnancy test kits, is one of the first steps in a \$600,000 Fisheries Research and Development Corporation project to improve the understanding of Tasmanian harmful algal blooms.

The partial 2012 shutdown of the Tasmanian shellfish industry shutdown that cost producers \$23m because of a toxic dinoflagellate bloom identified too late on the state's east coast. The new test can reduce screening and analysis times from days to hours or less.

Project leader, Prof Gustaaf Hallegraeff, said research will lead to a quick turnaround water and shellfish toxin sampling procedure able to identify the onset of any harmful blooms, which evolve with changing ocean and climatic conditions.

“Ultimate adoption by the Australian shellfish industry of these improved diagnostic tests will provide an on-site tool for farmers to manage their seafood harvest.

“The outcome is to reduce blanket closures of fisheries, and reducing the risk of unsafe product reaching domestic and export markets,” Prof Hallegraeff said.

The project was outlined this week to shellfish growers and industry managers at a meeting the Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Advisory Committee (ASQAAC) in Hobart.

Prof Hallegraeff said the unnecessary closure and delayed opening/closure advice for marine farmers was recognised as the industry's top problem, with industry calling for more rapid and reliable biotoxin and toxic species analysis.

As well as marine farmers, recreational fisheries on the east coast were impacted, estimated at a cost of nearly \$2m.



(including abalone, periwinkles, sea urchins, banded morwong, calamari, flathead and giant crabs) were tested and found to comply with the maximum limit for PST.

Product rejection by Japan led to a high-profile recall of product spanning several Australian states and international markets. Japanese authorities imposed a 100% border testing regime on all bivalves imported from Australia. This non-compliance event resulted in a \$23m loss to the Tasmanian economy. The incident resulted in widespread closures for 3-6 months of commercial and recreational bivalve growing areas, rock lobster, scallop and crab fisheries.

The inability to distinguish toxic and non-toxic dinoflagellate species and strains in early 2013 led to unnecessary harvest closures. Biotoxin problems recurred in September, 2013 causing closures along the East coast Tasmanian coastline from Bass Strait (scallops), St Helens and Bicheno (rock lobsters) to Spring Bay (mussels).

**Information released by:**

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