FIRST REPORT OF COCHLODINIUM POLYKRIKOIDES (DINOPHYCEAE), A HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOM (HAB) SPECIES IN THE COASTAL WATERS OF PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

Siti NorRohaida Harun¹, Normawaty Mohammad-Noor¹2*, Zuhairi Ahmad¹2, Kua Beng Chu³, Shahbudin Saad¹2, Nor Salamah Mohamad Hidayat¹ & Yukinori Mukai¹2

¹Department of Marine Science, Kulliyyah of Science, International Islamic University Malaysia, Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah, Bandar Indera Mahkota, Kuantan, Pahang, Malaysia
²Institute of Oceanography and Maritime Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kg. Cherok Paloh, Kuantan, Pahang, Malaysia
³National Fish Health Research Centre, Fisheries Research Institute, Department of Fisheries Malaysia, Batu Maung, Penang, Malaysia
*Corresponding author: normahwaty@iium.edu.my

ABSTRACT Cochlodinium polykrikoides is known as fish killer. In Malaysia this species has been recorded in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Borneo Island. To date, C. polykrikoides has not been recorded in Peninsular Malaysia. This study aims to identify the presence of C. polykrikoides in Peninsular Malaysia particularly in Tanjung Piandang, Kuala Kurau and Kuala Gula located in Perak coastal waters and Straits of Tebrau, Johor. Samplings were carried out for three times at each sampling station. Ten litre of water samples were collected for cell enumeration and identification. For identification, plankton samples were identified under light microscope. Nutrients i.e. nitrate, phosphate and ammonia were determined and physico-chemical parameters (pH, temperature, salinity) were also recorded in-situ. Species was identified as C. polykrikoides based on their morphological characteristics. Result showed that C. polykrikoides was presence in high abundance in both Perak coastal waters and Straits of Tebrau at concentration of 2.5 x 10^3 cells/L and 4.7 x 10^3 cells/L, respectively. No significant difference was found between cell abundance at these two locations. pH, salinities and temperatures recorded at both locations range between 7.68 – 7.80, 27.23 – 28.03 psu and 29.32 – 30.90 °C, respectively. There was no significant difference in the physico-chemical parameters (p>0.05) between stations. Regression analysis showed no correlations were between cell abundance and physico-chemical parameters and nutrients. The presence of C. polykrikoides in the coastal waters of Peninsular Malaysia indicates that possible mitigation needs to be given attention by the relevant agencies as this species can bring negative impact to aquaculture industry.

INTRODUCTION

The first case of harmful algal bloom (HAB) was reported in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia in 1976 and the causative organism was identified as Pyrodinium bahamense var. compressum [1]. Since then, many HAB cases have been reported in the coastal areas of Malaysia...
including the Peninsular Malaysia.

*C. polykrikodes* is a catenated, athecate, ichthyotoxic dinoflagellate species and have been recorded to occur in many countries including Japan [2], the Philippines [3], Korea (e.g. [4], China [5], Europe, America (e.g. [6] etc. The occurrence of the species appears to be expending globally as new areas were reported annually. This species is considered as harmful blooming species as it cause mortalities of both wild and farmed fish [7]. In Malaysia, *C. polykrikoides* was first reported in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah in 2005 [8]. During the event, caged fish mortality was reported. Consequently in 2007, the blooms of *C. polykriokides* continued to dominate the area and nutrients from heavy rainfall supports the occurrence of this species [9]. During these events the fishermen experiences a great loss. This indicates that blooms of *Cochlodinium* can cause severe impact towards aquaculture industry in Malaysia. To date there was no record on the occurrence of *C. polykrikoides* in Peninsular Malaysia. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the occurrence and distribution of *C. polykrikoides* blooms in several places viz. Perak and Straits of Tebrau, in Peninsular Malaysia. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the occurrence and distribution of *C. polykrikoides* blooms in several places viz. Perak and Straits of Tebrau, in Peninsular Malaysia. During this study, phytoplankton blooms were reported in Perak coastal waters causing red discoloration of the water and coincided with mortality of cultured finfish. To support this study, physico-chemical parameters were recorded in-situ. Results of this study are important to create awareness among the fishermen and relevant agencies on the emerging problem of HAB cause by *C. polykrikoides* particularly in Peninsular Malaysia.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Samples of phytoplankton were collected from Perak coastal area, West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia and Straits of Tebrau, located between Johor and Singapore (Figure 1). Samples from Perak coastal waters i.e. at Tanjung Piandang, Kuala Kurau and Kuala Gula were first collected on March 2013 which was approximately one week after the bloom was reported by Fisheries Department, Malaysia. Samples were collected at 9 stations from Perak coastal waters. These stations were located in 3 transects and these transects were located 1 km from the shore (Figure 1). The distance between stations was 10 km and between transects was 5 km. In Straits of Tebrau, samples were collected from 5 stations situated along the straits. Both areas received influence from rivers nearby and a lot of fish cages were observed here. Samples were collected three times at each sampling area which were 15th March 2013, 18th June 2013 and 23rd October for Perak and 4th April 2013, 6th July 2013 and 6th October 2013 for Johor.

At each station, 10 L of phytoplankton samples were collected at 0.5 m below the sea surface by using Van Dorn water sampler and preserved immediately with Lugol’s iodine. In the laboratory, these samples were concentrated into 50 mL [10]. Enumeration was done by counting the cells in 1 mL of sample using Sedgwick Rafter cell under light microscope at magnification of 100 times. Cell enumerations were performed twice for each sample and cell abundances in cells/L were determined as below:

\[
1 \text{ mL} = x \text{ cells}
\]

\[
50 \text{ mL} = x \text{ cells} \times 50 \text{ mL} = x \text{ cells}/50\text{ mL} = x \text{ cells}/10\text{ L}
\]

In 1L = \((x \text{ cells}/10\text{ L}) \times 1\text{ L} = x \text{ cells}/L\)

Nutrients such as nitrate, phosphate and ammonia were also determined using standard methods by Parson et al.[11]. Physico-chemical parameters such as temperature (°C), salinity (psu), turbidity and pH were recorded using YSI 556 Multi-Probe System at the same depth where phytoplankton samples were collected. Statistical analysis such as one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the significant difference of cell densities, physico-chemical parameters and nutrients between each station. Regression analysis was carried out to determine the relationship between cell abundance and physico-chemico parameters including nutrients.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Species formed chain of 2-4 cells, 30-40µm in long and 20-24 µm in wide, unarmored and slightly compressed dorsoventrally (Figure 2). Based on morphological characteristics, the species was identified as *Cochlodinium polykrikoides* (Figure 2). In Perak coastal water, *C. polykrikoides* abundance reached the cell density of 2.5 x 10^3 cells/L during the first sampling and 40 cells/L during second sampling (Figure 3). No cell was recorded during third sampling.

In Straits of Tebrau, *C. polykrikoides* was found on second sampling with the highest cell density of 4.7 x 10^3 cells/L at Station 2 (Figure 2). However, no *C. polykrikoides* was found on the first and third samplings.

Fish die due to *C. polykrikoides* blooms have been reported elsewhere including in Sabah, Malaysia. In this area, *C. polykrikoides* has been reported to occur year-round with the highest cell density was 1.54 x 10^7 cells/L [9]. According to Richlen [12] the bloom of *C. polykrikoides* in the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman, has caused mass killing of fish, damaging ecosystem of coral reefs, and impact the coastal tourism. In Korea, *C. polykrikoides* has bloom in the entire south coast of Korea and has
caused US$ 60 million economic losses [13]. The damage caused by *C. polykrikoides* not only affects the economy of the country but also decrease the trust of the consumer. Although *C. polykrikodes* is not a toxic species, the ability of this species to cause huge fish-killing in cage culture will bring fear to public on the safety of fish sell in the market. *C. polykrikoides* is a ichthyotoxic dinoflagellate in which they can cause gill hyperglasia, hemorrhaging, squamation and apoptosis to fish gills and digestive tracts of fish [14][15].

The occurrence of *C. polykrikoides* has been reported to be supported by many factors. Study by Mohammad-Noor et al.[16] indicated that nutrient plays a significant role in triggering the bloom compared to physicochemical parameters. However, the right combination of nutrient and physicochemical parameters is needed to promote the bloom [16]. It is reported that *C. polykrikoides* occurred in their highest abundance when salinity range from 25-30 psu, temperature range from 29-30°C [15][9] and pH ranging from 8.1-8.7 [9]. The concentrations of nitrates and phosphate recorded in this study were low (Table 1) compared to nitrate and phosphate recorded during *C. polykrikoides* blooms in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah [17]. Regression analysis demonstrated no correlations between cell abundance and water quality parameters including nutrients. However, others studies reported that blooms of *C. polykrikoides* have positive correlation with ammonia, nitrates and phosphate. Koch [16], (2014), mentioned that this species prefer ammonium compared to urea and nitrate as nitrogen sources. The high flexibility in its nutrients acquisition strategies [14] give *C. polykrikoides* advantage to expand globally compared to other species.

Figure 2. *C. polykrikoides*. A. Live samples from Perak coastal waters. B. Preserved samples from Straits of Tebrau. Scale bar = 20 µm.

Table 1. Mean with standard error of physico-chemical parameters and nutrients recorded at each location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Johor</th>
<th>Perak</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pH</td>
<td>7.68 ± 0.09</td>
<td>7.80 ± 0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salinity (psu)</td>
<td>27.23 ± 1.35</td>
<td>28.03 ± 4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature (°C)</td>
<td>29.32 ± 0.13</td>
<td>30.90 ± 0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammonia (mg/L)</td>
<td>0.639 ± 0.526</td>
<td>0.321 ± 0.193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitrate (mg/L)</td>
<td>0.08 ± 0.007</td>
<td>0.094 ± 0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phosphate (mg/L)</td>
<td>0.001 ± 0.001</td>
<td>0.00 ± 0.000</td>
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CONCLUSIONS

This is the first record of *C. polykrikodes* in Peninsular Malaysia. The occurrence creates an alarm to the respective authority to develop a management plan to control HAB in this area.

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