

Enhanced Official Controls for shellfish and phytoplankton sampling under the Irish Shellfish Monitoring Programme

In response to recommendations from the Food and Veterinary Office of the European Commission, a Trilateral (FSAI/SFPA/MI) Working Group was established to review the Irish Shellfish Monitoring Programme and identify where improvements could be made to the current Programme. The aim of the Working Group was to improve the robustness of the monitoring programme, and so ensure that only safe food is placed on the market. The following changes have been agreed by the Trilateral group and will be introduced from the 1st of July 2014 to take effect from **Sunday 03 August 2014**

Changes to the Programme

1. Official Control Sampling

-Verification Sampling

The Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) will take one Official Control shellfish verification sample per month for species/areas on a weekly sampling frequency and quarterly for species/areas on a monthly sampling frequency.

Each Senior Port Officer (SPO) will be responsible for the scheduling of the verification samples for the production areas within their region that are actively harvesting. A Sea Fisheries Protection Officer (SFPO) shall inform the Shellfish Sampler in advance of taking the verification sample to avoid duplicate sampling. The SFPO will take the verification sample but on occasions where the SFPO is unable to take the sample, a Shellfish Sampler may take the verification sample. This sampling will be under the supervision of the SFPO and the SFPO will supply the Shellfish Sampler with an SFPA Official Sample Advice Note to accompany the sample. The verification sample must be accompanied by an SFPA Official Sample Advice Note in all cases.

-Sampling to Open a Production Area, following a toxic event

The SFPA will take an Official Control sample, when a production area is on Closed Pending, to open a production area following a toxic event. If the Official Sample is under the legal limits for toxins, then the area will be assigned an Open status.

An SFPO will take the shellfish sample to open a production area but on occasions where the SFPO is unable to take the sample, a Shellfish Sampler may take the sample to open the area. This sampling will be under the supervision of the SFPO and the SFPO will supply the Shellfish Sampler with an SFPA Official Sample Advice Note to accompany the sample. The sample to open an area must be accompanied in all cases by an SFPA Official Sample Advice Note, otherwise the sample will be rejected.

A Shellfish Sampler should not take a sample where the status of an area is Closed Pending unless they have been requested to do so by the SFPO and the SFPO has supplied them with an SFPA Sample Advice Note to accompany the sample.

To assist with the scheduling of the Official Control Samples to open an area, the MI will produce weekly reports, to identify areas that have been assigned a Closed Pending status following a toxic episode. These reports will be issued on Thursday of each week or earlier. The Shellfish Sampler or a producer may wish to contact the SFPO about the Official Sample when an area is on a Closed Pending status if, for example, they are waiting to commence harvesting.

2. Phytoplankton Sampling

Every classified shellfish production area must collect weekly phytoplankton samples in order to remain on an open status. This requirement applies regardless of the sampling frequency for the shellfish species in the production area and will take effect from the 25th May 2014 (week 22).

A minimum of three weekly samples will be required in every rolling 4 week period. If the frequency of sampling drops below this level the area will not be assigned an Open status on the next clear shellfish result. **Dormant areas that wish to re-open, must send in 2 weekly samples of phytoplankton (in addition to the shellfish samples) in advance of their expected week of recommencing harvesting.**

From the 31st of August 2014 (week 36) any production area not meeting the minimum of 3 out of 4 weekly phytoplankton samples will not be assigned an open status. There will be no management cell decisions for production areas where phytoplankton sampling is not at the minimum phytoplankton sampling frequency.

Areas that do not have an open status are not required to take weekly phytoplankton samples but if samples are sent to the MI they will be analysed. If an area is sending in shellfish samples then it must send in phytoplankton samples also.

Additional Information

The above changes to the programme do not include the production areas within Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough. These Loughs are sampled under an agreement with the Loughs Agency.

GPS co-ordinates of the point of sampling will be recorded on the SFPA Official Sample Advice Note. An updated Advice Note will be issued to include space for the inclusion of the GPS position of sampling. The GPS position must be recorded in all cases on the SFPA Official Sample Advice Note from the 1st July 2014, otherwise the sample will be rejected.

The COP for the Irish Shellfish Monitoring Programme (Biotoxins) will be updated to include the changes to the Programme outlined in this document.

Quick Guide to the Biotxin and Phytoplankton Sampling Requirements

