

FSA in NI PROTOCOL FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF *E.COLI* RESULTS OUTWITH CLASSIFICATION & HIGH *E.COLI* RESULTS

Introduction

FSA in NI, as competent authority, is responsible for classifying shellfish harvesting areas in NI, as required by EC Regulation 854/2004. Shellfish harvesting areas are classified according to the extent to which shellfish, sampled from the area, are contaminated with *E. coli*. The classification of a harvesting area determines the treatment required before the shellfish may be placed on the market.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Class A (≤ 230 <i>E. coli</i>/100g flesh) – shellfish can be harvested for direct human consumption.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Class B (231 – 4600 <i>E. coli</i>/100g flesh) – shellfish can go for human consumption after depuration or after relaying in a Class A relaying area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Class C (4601 – 46000 <i>E. coli</i>/100g flesh) – shellfish can go for human consumption only after relaying in a Class A relaying area for long period of time (at least two months) or after heat treatment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Above 46000 <i>E. coli</i>/100g flesh – prohibited – harvesting not permitted.

Classified shellfish harvesting areas in NI are periodically monitored, as part of FSA in NI's official control monitoring programmes, to ensure the classification, awarded by the Agency, is appropriate. The classification of each harvesting area is reviewed annually.

In Northern Ireland, shellfish flesh samples are collected by designated sampling officers and delivered to the Public Health Laboratory (PHL) in Belfast, where microbiological testing is carried out to detect levels of *E.coli*. The results are reported to FSA in NI, the relevant District Council and Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), via email.

Review of microbiological results

In addition to the annual review of microbiological results, FSA in NI will continually monitor *E. coli* results throughout the year to ensure that:

- Harvesters can plan for depuration/heat treatment of the shellfish, if necessary; and
- Harvesting can be suspended when microbiological results indicate a potential risk to public health.

Results outwith classification & High *E.coli* results that may pose risk to public health

High levels of *E.coli* in the shellfish may represent a public health risk and so measures may need to be put in place to protect the safety of consumers.

FSA in NI's intention is to introduce formal procedures to deal with *E.coli* results outwith classification (when a Class A/B area receives a B/C result) and when results are significantly high and may indicate a potential risk to public health. These procedures should be initiated as soon as possible after the result has been received from the PHL.

The implementation of such a control system involves the introduction of two procedures – 'Investigation Procedure' and 'Action Procedure' and liaising with the relevant interested parties.

Local Action Groups

FSA in NI will liaise with the relevant District Council enforcement officer, NIEA, the sampling officer and the harvester (a Local Action Group) who will in turn investigate results outwith classification and significantly high *E.coli* results that may indicate a potential risk to public health. The role of the LAG will be to provide advice and, where necessary, carry out more extensive incident investigations – when action is required to protect public health. The LAG will be required to share and exchange information via email.

Procedures

It is proposed to introduce two procedures – one to deal with results just outwith classification (Investigation) and one to deal with results that may pose a risk to public health and therefore require enforcement action (Action).

The criteria for initiating each procedure is as follows:

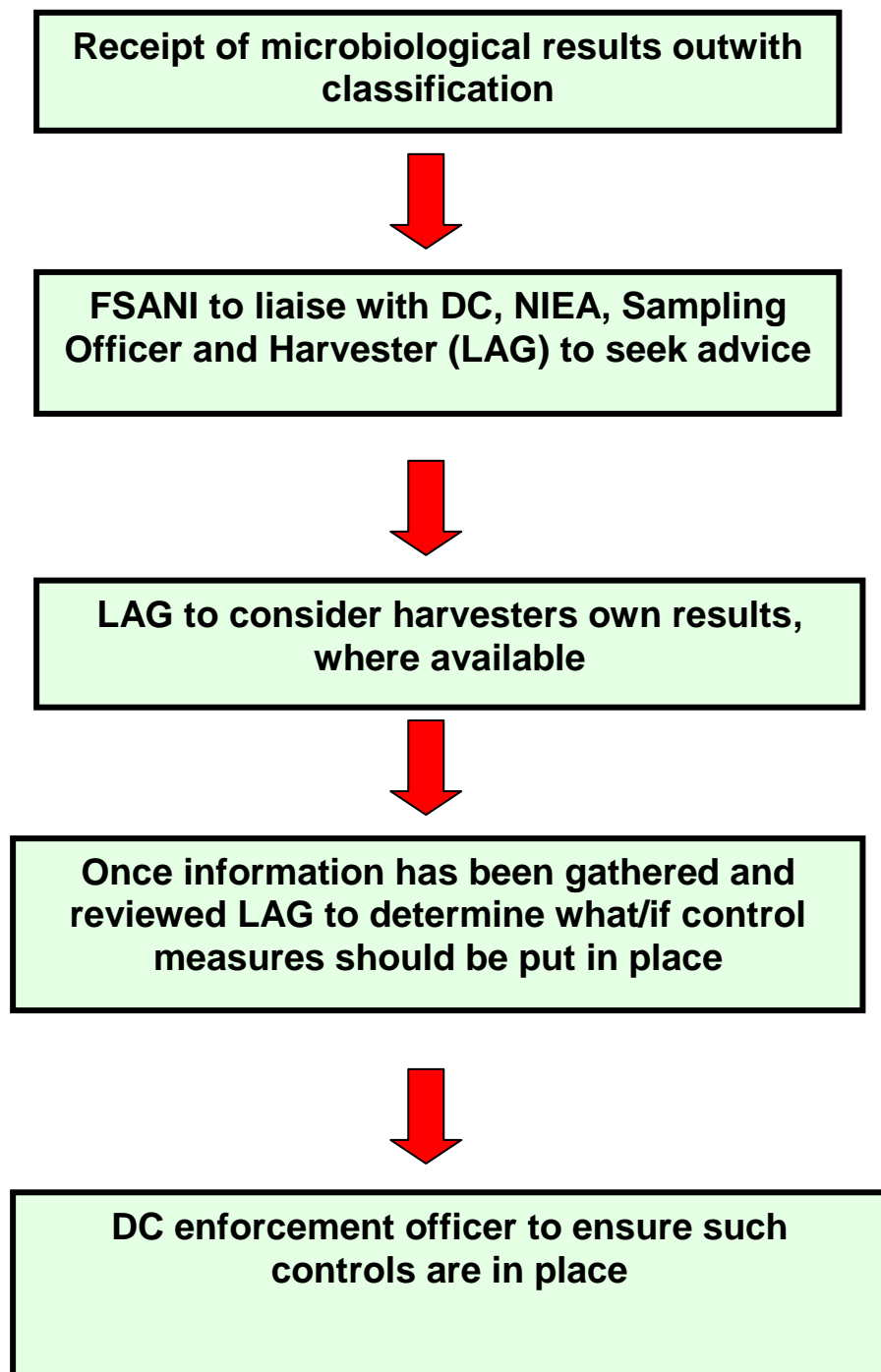
Investigation Procedure

This stage shall only apply to Class A & B harvesting areas and is an initial, investigation for results outwith classification – see trigger levels below:

- **Class A harvesting areas – 231-46000 *E.coli*/100g flesh (Class B/C result)**
- **Class B harvesting areas – 4601-46000 *E.coli*/100g flesh (Class C result)**

When FSA in NI is informed of microbiological results outwith classification (within the above ranges), FSA in NI will consult with the LAG to determine the possible cause of the result and consider the harvester's own EPT results. The group will decide what control measures, if any, should be put in place until *E.coli* levels revert to below the relevant classification category threshold.

NB: In the case of harvesting areas receiving results outwith classification, the harvester is required to ensure that their product is undergoing the appropriate treatment in order to achieve end product standards before being placed on the market (<230 *E.coli*/100g flesh).



Action Procedure

This state of action will apply where *E. coli* results exceed the level below:

➤ **>46000 *E.coli*/100g flesh**

For any result above the statutory maximum (46,000 *E. coli* / 100g flesh), the harvesting area must be closed by a Temporary Closure Notice (TCN) until two samples, taken at least 7 days apart, show results that are under the statutory level.

NB: For Shellfish harvesting area closures – please refer to FSANI protocol on microbiological bed closures.

