Shellfish classification

How production areas are classified, the method of treatment and how to apply for classification.

The classification of a production area determines the treatment required before Live Bivalve Molluscs (shellfish) may be marketed for human consumption.

Shellfish production and relay areas are classified according to the levels of E. coli detected in shellfish flesh.

Permitted levels of E. coli

Levels of E. coli are measured per 100g flesh.

In all cases, the health standards are set out in:

- Annex III of European Community Regulation 853/2004
- Annex II of European Community Regulation 854/2004

The end product microbiological criteria specified in the European Regulation 2073/2005 must also be met.

The production area will be classified as A, B or C, with A as the least and C as the most contaminated. The level of treatment required to remove contamination from the LBMs after harvesting depends on this classification. If contamination levels are consistently so high that a class C cannot be achieved then harvesting from the area may be prohibited.

The standards that must be achieved and the level of treatment required for each classification are:

Class A

- minimum of 10 samples required per year
- 80% of sample results must be less than or equal to 230 E. coli/100g
- no results may exceed 700 E. coli/100g

Shellfish can be harvested for direct human consumption if the end product standard requirements are met.

Class B

- minimum of 8 samples required per year
- 90% of sample results must be less than or equal to 4600 E. coli/100g
- No sample result may exceed 46000 E. coli/100g

Shellfish can be supplied for human consumption after one of three processes. The options are:

- purification in an approved establishment
- relaying for at least one month in a classified Class A relaying area
- an EC approved heat treatment process

For class B beds in England and Wales, there is a long term classification (LTC) system. This is in place to show greater stability in the classifications which are based on compliance over
five years instead of the standard three years.

**Class C**

- minimum of 8 samples required per year
- All sample results must be less than or equal to 46000 E. coli/100g

Shellfish can only be sold for human consumption after completing one of three possible processes.

These processes are:

- relaying for at least two months in an approved class B relaying area followed by treatment in an approved purification centre
- relaying for at least two months in an approved class A relaying area
- after an EC approved heat treatment process

**Prohibited areas**

Shellfish from areas with consistently prohibited level results (greater than 46000 E. coli/100g) must not be subject to production or be harvested.

**Shellfish Purification**

Shellfish can be purified (depurated) by holding them in purpose built tanks of clean or artificial seawater. The shellfish are placed in water for the time necessary to reduce contamination to make them fit for human consumption. The water conditions encourage the shellfish to filter out contaminants such as *E. coli*.

Dispatch centres are any on-shore or off-shore area that processes shellfish fit for human consumption.

All purification and dispatch establishments must be approved by your Local Authority. You must meet the specific requirements for purification and dispatch centres in Annex III of Regulation (EC) 853/2004.

For further information on purification and approval please refer to our Purification Guide and approval aide memoire.

**Application process**

**Potential classification and filling out the form**

If you are interested in principle to harvest/fish or relay shellfish in England and Wales, you must first apply for classification of the production area. The production or relay area application form should be completed by the applicant (the harvester) and the Local Authority.

Please note that the classification of a shellfish harvesting area does not confer the right to harvest shellfish.
You may need permissions from other bodies before proceeding. It is the responsibility of the applicant to obtain these permissions, as required, and for the Local Authority to check everything is in place, including their ability to sample for ongoing monitoring, before the application is submitted to the FSA.

This form needs to be forwarded to us with a suitable map and any other relevant supporting information as specified in the form.

The preferred format is a copy of an:

- OS 1:25,000
- 1:50,000 map
- Admiralty chart with the position and extent of the shellfish beds clearly marked

View Application form for classification of shellfish harvesting area as PDF (681.92 KB)
View Application checklist for shellfish as Word (19.61 KB)

Northern Ireland

View Application form for classification in Northern Ireland as PDF (375.71 KB)

After you’ve sent the form

Once we receive your application, it is verified by us and we will ask for further information or clarification if needed. Once we are satisfied, we will send it to our contractor to undertake a Representative Monitoring Point (RMP) assessment if it’s necessary.

An RMP assessment is an assessment of the pollution sources affecting the area, to find appropriate sampling points and determine a sampling plan for potential classification.

Ten samples at least a week apart are required for a provisional classification. After a full year of sampling, an annual classification may be approved.

In some cases, a preliminary classification can be given ahead of a provisional classification. Further information on the classification process is available in the classification protocols.

RMP assessments and sanitary surveys

RMP assessments April 2017 - March 2020

A sanitary survey is an assessment of the pollution sources affecting the wider production area, i.e. encompasses numerous RMP’s.

Sanitary Survey reports 2007 - 2017

Classification protocol

When a shellfish bed has been closed indefinitely additional samples may be required before a bed may be re-opened. The classification process may have to start again if it is closed for a number of years or if has been declassified.

You can apply for classification in England and Wales using our application form.

Protocol for the Classification of Shellfish production and relaying areas in England and Wales
There is more information on the classification protocols for Northern Ireland.

You can apply for classification in Northern Ireland using our application form.

**Northern Ireland**

View Protocol for the Classification of Shellfish production and relaying areas in Northern Ireland as PDF (556.56 KB)

**Dealing with high results**

Local action groups exist in England and Wales.

For further information please refer to our Local action group guidance.

A local action group is led by your Local Authority and can include local industry groups, fishermen or shellfish gatherers and other stakeholders who can contribute to the investigation, e.g. the Environment Agency or Natural Resources Wales and Water Companies. This group deal with high results and consider whether to:

- close the bed
- notify harvesters
- take action to protect public health
- liaise with FSA food incidents when necessary

**Action plans**

Local action plans are decided using local factors and conditions. The amount of detail in the plan will depend on:

- the number and size of shellfish beds under the responsibility of the Local Food Authority
- any special local conditions
- the number of stakeholders involved

**Action states**

Action states apply to all classes of shellfish beds. It will be in place after your results have been found to be above the permitted level.

A bed may be temporarily downgraded or closed as part of short term control measures during an Action State.

To re-open the bed at its previous classification, two consecutive satisfactory samples taken at least seven days apart.

We start investigating into classification results that are, for example, above the threshold for the classification awarded.
Information from DAERA, NIEA and harvesters will be asked for to try to establish the cause of the higher result and determine future action.

Any areas with results above the permitted level will be closed for harvesting.

**Current classification lists**

**England and Wales**

[View Shellfish Classifications England and Wales 2019-2020 as PDF](#) (406.79 KB)

**Northern Ireland**

[View Shellfish Harvesting Classifications Northern Ireland 2019 as PDF](#) (242.84 KB)

**Classification monitoring results**

- [England and Wales](#)
- [Northern Ireland](#)