Under Regulation (EC) 854/2004, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in Northern Ireland, as competent authority of the member state, must establish the location and fix the boundaries of shellfish production areas. Using the faecal coliform indicating bacteria, Escherichia coli (E. coli), the competent authority must list and classify these production areas according to the degree of contamination in samples of mollusc flesh.

Classification of an area determines the level of post harvest treatment required before placing on the market for human consumption.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Permitted Levels</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A ≤230</td>
<td>Less than or equal to 230 E. coli/100g flesh</td>
<td>May go direct for human consumption if end product standard met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B 231-4600</td>
<td>More than 230 and less than or equal to 4,600 E. coli/100g flesh (in 90% of samples)</td>
<td>Must be subject to purification, relaying in Class A area (to meet Category A requirements) or cooked by an approved method.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 4601-46,000</td>
<td>More than 4,600 and less than or equal to 46,000 E. coli/100g flesh</td>
<td>Must be subject to relaying for a period of at least 2 months or cooked by an approved method.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46,001 and above E. coli/100g flesh</td>
<td>Prohibited. Harvesting not permitted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the introduction of the EU Hygiene Regulations, before a new production can be classified a sanitary survey must be carried out.

Sanitary surveys identify sources of pollution/contamination such as sewage plants, industrial waste sources, sewage overflows and discharge from boats, storm drains, street runoff, rural land with domestic animals and forest or marsh areas dominated by wild animals and/or birds. These factors are then reviewed in conjunction with the effects of rainfall, river and tidal flows, farming activities, and geographical proximity from the source to the production areas. Other environmental influences considered when generating a sanitary survey, include effects of season, temperature, sunshine and wind.

**Getting started**

For new areas to be classified an application form must be completed and sent to FSA in NI. A standard classification application form and information sheet can be found at annex 1.

It is recommended that you contact FSA in NI to discuss any potential applications at the earliest opportunity, in order to consider any requirements for a sanitary survey. As part of the classification process a number of samples may be required to be collected and
analysed for *E. coli* prior to the classification being awarded. FSA in NI will liaise with the shellfish harvester to confirm sampling requirements.

Classifications are species specific and shellfish harvesters who have requested classification for more than one species in an area should ensure that samples of each species are submitted for analysis from proposed new site.

Samples must be analysed by a UKAS accredited laboratory and in accordance with the agreed and accredited method (ISO TS 16649 part 3). Results obtained using other methods cannot acceptable for classification purposes.

In addition to sampling and monitoring for *E. coli*, two samples must be collected and analysed for marine biotoxins. Both samples must be below Regulatory limits for DSP, PSP & ASP toxins before commercial harvesting can take place.

**Classification Procedures**

Once a new production area has been classified it will be included as part FSA in NI’s Official Control monitoring programme.

Classified shellfish production areas are monitored for a range of parameters including to ensure the classification is appropriate. The classification of the production area is dependent on the *E. coli* results of Official Control monitoring programme.

Classifications are reviewed on an annual basis and are based on the monitoring data received applying the requirements set down in EC 854/2004. These allow a 90% tolerance to be applied to class B areas. Therefore providing that 90% of received samples are within the B classification that classification will be applied. FSA in NI independently assess the classification data and the UK National Reference Laboratory – Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science (Cefas) will be asked to arbitrate where FSA in NI have questions regarding the classifications.

**Representative Monitoring Points – RMP’s**

FSA in NI has set representative monitoring points (*E. coli* RMPs) for all classified shellfish production areas. These points have been set in accordance with the recommendations from the sanitary survey which has been conducted on the relevant production area. The sanitary survey will set the sampling plan unique to each individual production area. An RMP may have a number of Associated Harvesting Areas (AHA’s). The *E. coli* RMPs sample data will be used for classification purposes for the AHA production areas.

FSA in NI will inform harvesters, District Councils and other interested parties of the awarded annual classifications by 31st January of each year. This information will also be published on the FSA website at:  

For existing classified production areas, the minimum number of samples that are required to maintain an A classification is 10 samples over a twelve month period. The minimum number of samples required to maintain B/C classification is 8 over a twelve month period.
Failure to obtain the required number of samples can cause difficulty when awarding the annual classification. In cases where less than the required numbers of samples are collected the area may be de-classified.

**Declassification**

This may occur under the following circumstances:

- Where the required number of samples (as per the sampling requirements above) has not been met.
- Shellfish harvesting is no longer occurring at a specific site and declassification is requested;
- Areas have been identified where no harvesting has taken place for an extended period of time.

A declassified production area seeking re-classification will have to make a new application to FSA in NI.
## APPLICATION FORM FOR
CLASSIFICATION OF SHELLFISH HARVESTING AREA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>APPLICANT DETAILS</strong></th>
<th><strong>DISTRICT COUNCIL DETAILS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Applicant:</td>
<td>Name of District Council:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Company:</td>
<td>Enforcement Officer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Contact Information:</em></th>
<th><em>Contact Information:</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tel No:</td>
<td>Tel No:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Tel No:</td>
<td>Mobile Tel No:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax No:</td>
<td>Fax No:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Email:</th>
<th>Email:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

## HARVESTING DETAILS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Species: (any others?)</em></th>
<th><strong>SITE DETAILS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Oyster (Crassostrea gigas)</td>
<td>Site Name and Area, including co-ordinates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Oyster (Ostrea edulis)</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Scallop (Pecten maximus)</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen Scallop (Aequipecten opercularis)</td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Mussel (Mytilus edulis)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand Gaper (Mya arenaria)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Razor Fish (Ensis Ensis)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Cockle (Cerastoderma edule)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surf Clam (Spisula solida)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic Cyprine (Arctica islandica)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpet Clam (Venerupis senegalensis)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venus Clam (Chamelea gallina)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayed Artemis (Dosinia exoleta)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse Mussel (Modiolus modiolus)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ANY OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)**
Is this site within currently classified harvesting area?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If No, has this site previously been classified? 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If yes, please provide year

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**ANY OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION:**

**SANITARY SURVEY INVESTIGATION INFORMATION:**

*Are any of the following located within the area surrounding or area within your site? (YES/NO)*

- Private/municipal sewage plant(s)?
- Industrial waste source(s) (e.g. meat processing plants etc.)?
- Combined sewage overflow(s)?
- Animal feed or poultry house(s)?
- Boating Activity?
- Storm drains or street runoff?
- Rural land with domestic animals?
- Forest, marsh etc. (dominated by wild animals and birds)?
- Any other potential source of E.coli?

(WHERE APPROPRIATE PLEASE PROVIDE RELEVANT MAPS OF AREA NOTIFYING OF POINTS OF DISCHARGE ETC)

Signature of applicant:

Date:
INFORMATION SHEET

Before harvesting and classification of shellfish

It is an offence for any person to farm shellfish in Northern Ireland without a fish culture licence granted under the provisions of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966, as amended. A shellfish fishery licence is an optional licence which gives the fish culture licence holder the exclusive rights to cultivate a particular species of shellfish within a specified area (and so the exclusive right to take that shellfish from the area) and at the same time gives the licence holder recourse to criminal offences to protect his/her operations. Anyone wishing to apply for a fish culture and/or shellfish fishery licence should contact Fisheries and Climate Change Division, DARD – see contact details for DARD below.

Commercial fishing anywhere by fishing boats which are registered in the United Kingdom or are British owned is prohibited unless authorised by a licence granted by a UK Department or Fisheries Administration, except for boats of 10m and under which are not powered by an engine. In addition there are various restrictions on fishing activity imposed by conservation legislation. These may include the location of fishing, daily or seasonal closures and specifications for the fishing gear that may be used. For information on these issues or any fishing activity contact DARD, Fisheries and Climate Change Division – see contact details below for DARD.

Before shellfish can be placed on the market for human consumption, the harvesting area must be classified, in accordance with EC legislation, by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) – see contact details for FSA in NI below.

Shellfish harvester must apply to FSA in NI for classification of a new shellfish harvesting area – using the application form.

FSA in NI will process the application as soon as possible after receipt. Where application forms have details missing, then delay in processing may occur.
Once FSA in NI has processed the application form, the applicant will be informed of the next steps;

- If the area requires a sanitary survey

- The required number of samples

**After classification and before placing on the market of shellfish**

Before commercial harvesting of the newly classified area can take place, harvesters must ensure they are registered with the District Council where the new shellfish harvesting area is located. District Council EHOs will issue harvesters with the necessary registration documents, which are required to accompany the movement of shellfish – as outlined in EC legislation.

Registration documents must accompany shellfish from the harvesting area to the final dispatch centre.
FSA CONTACT DETAILS:

Anthony Higgins
Primary Production
FSA in NI
10a-c Clarendon Road
Belfast
BT1 3BG

Tel: 02890 417761
Fax: 02890 417726
Email: Anthony.Higgins@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

DARD Fisheries & Climate Change Details:

Aquaculture and Fish Health

Clare White
Room 426
Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
Ballymiscaw
Belfast
BT4 3SB

Tel: 028 9076 5817
Email: Clare.white@dardni.gov.uk

Commercial Fishing

Jonathan Campbell
Room 414
Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
Ballymiscaw
Belfast
BT4 3SB

Tel: 028 9052 4971
Fax: 028 9037 8323
Email: jonathan.campbell@dardni.gov.uk