



Opening Statement of the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority

Joint Committee on Fisheries and Maritime Affairs / Joint Committee on Climate, Environment and Energy

30th June 2026

Thank you for the invitation to appear before both the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Fisheries and Maritime Affairs as well as the Joint Committee on Climate, Environment and Energy. My name is Louise Murphy, and I am an Authority Member of the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA). I am joined today by my colleague Adrienne Patterson, Executive Manager Operations. We welcome the opportunity to outline the role of the SFPA from a food safety perspective, and in particular, the areas within our remit pertaining to the production of safe seafood.

The SFPA is an independent, statutory, non-commercial public body, established under the provisions of the Sea-Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006 and under the aegis of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. It is Ireland's competent authority for Seafood Safety and Sea-Fisheries Protection. For our seafood safety functions, we operate under a service contract with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI). The SFPA's role in relation to the safety of shellfish for human consumption includes:

- Management of the National Shellfish Microbiological Monitoring and Classification Programme,
- The annual review and classification of aquaculture production areas,
- The completion of sanitary surveys for each production area, and
- The investigation and management of food safety incidents and complaints.

Environmental water quality management, pollution enforcement, and fish kill investigation do not fall under the remit of the SFPA, nor does the SFPA have an advisory role in relation to water quality.

Protecting seafood safety is crucial, not only to the reputation of Ireland's seafood offering both at home and abroad, but ultimately for the health and well-being of consumers of Irish seafood products. The SFPA is responsible for the implementation of classification and biotoxin sampling plans to ensure that products are safe for human consumption. The SFPA manages the National Shellfish Microbiological Monitoring and Classification Programme. This programme facilitates the sampling of shellfish for a variety of toxins and E. coli levels to ensure they are within the regulatory limits for safe seafood. E. coli levels are an indicator of the quality of the water that shellfish are grown in.

Annually, the SFPA reviews the classification status of production areas, this is done collaboratively with industry as well as other State bodies including the FSAI and Marine Institute. The annual classification of production areas takes into account the monitoring data from the previous three years. In the 2025 annual review, 144 classifications across 61 production areas were assessed, with over 4,800 E. coli results analysed across the three-year review period.

The SFPA also conducts sanitary surveys of classified production areas under EU regulations. A sanitary survey identifies the potential contamination and outflow sources in a production area, including wastewater infrastructure, agricultural inputs, and urban drainage which could be a source of pollution. A sanitary survey assists the SFPA to identify the most appropriate sampling points for each production area (also known as a representative monitoring points - RMP's). Findings from each sanitary survey are shared with relevant agencies and producers, as is the annual classification review of production areas. Relevant publications are available on the SFPA website.

The SFPA's role is to investigate all food incidents, verify traceability and food business operator controls. Where unsafe product is on the market, the SFPA verifies that recalls and withdrawals are carried out efficiently and effectively. The SFPA does not have a remit in relation to environmental water quality management.

In summary, the SFPA's role is to protect public health by ensuring that shellfish harvested from Ireland's classified production areas are safe for human consumption, and responds to food safety incidents when water quality or other factors have given rise to risk. We are committed to working with all relevant agencies within our statutory remit. My colleague and I look forward to your questions.