



AN t-ÚDARÁS UM  
CHOSAINT  
IASCAIGH MHARA

SEA-FISHERIES  
PROTECTION  
AUTHORITY

## Press Release

Issued by the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority's Press Office

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### **SFPA Publishes Annual Classification List of Ireland's Shellfish Production Areas**

The Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) has published the annual classification list\* for commercial shellfish (bivalve mollusc) production areas across Ireland, assessing 136 classifications in 58 production areas against strict safety requirements for human consumption.

During this year's 2024 annual review of classifications, twenty-one production areas received 'upgrades' to their classifications, and nine production areas received 'downgrades'.

Live shellfish can only be harvested from production areas which meet strict classification requirements for human consumption, as set out under European and Irish Food laws. The SFPA, in collaboration with the shellfish industry, conducts regular shellfish sampling in all production areas, monitoring the levels of bacterial contamination of shellfish to determine the risk and classification status. Each production area is designated a rating that determines the conditions, if any, which need to be observed before shellfish can be sold for human consumption (see notes for more information).

According to the Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM), Ireland produced an estimated 26,000 tonnes of shellfish in 2023 of the following species: mussels (both rope and bottom culture), oysters, clams, cockles, and scallops - from classified production areas annually, and an additional 5,800 tonnes of scallops are landed from offshore sites. The Irish aquaculture farmed shellfish sector is worth an estimated €68m annually (down 4% on last year's figures). Over 85% of shellfish produced in Ireland is exported, principally to European and Asian markets, and Ireland is the second largest producer of oysters in Europe after France. \*\*

Paschal Hayes, Executive Chairperson of the SFPA said that Ireland's shellfish monitoring programme was important for both consumers and commercial producers.

“One of the principal remits of the SFPA is to ensure that Irish and international consumers can be assured of the quality and safety of fish and seafood harvested here.

Shellfish production is an important industry in many coastal communities around Ireland and it is essential that the highest standards of food safety are maintained at all times. The SFPA works in collaboration with industry and other state agencies to ensure that production areas are of the highest possible standard and meet rigorous assessment criteria to ensure that the safety and quality of the shellfish placed on the market is not compromised in any manner.

This work is an important pillar in both preserving and further enhancing Ireland’s global reputation for quality, safe and delicious seafood. It is incumbent upon all working in the industry to remain vigilant to any risks which have the potential to impact our seafood production areas and that we adopt a collective approach throughout with a focus on quality and sustainable seafood.”

Bill Dore, Team Leader, Shellfish Microbiology, Marine Institute said: “The publication of the classification list is the annual culmination of the ongoing partnership between the Marine Institute and the SFPA in the microbiological monitoring of shellfish production areas in Ireland. As the National Reference Laboratory for monitoring *E. coli* contamination in bivalve shellfish, the Marine Institute oversees the national *E. coli* testing programme ensuring high quality test results produced by the laboratories. This contributes significantly to the assessment of the risk of microbiological contamination in shellfish production areas and the overall classification status of individual production areas.”

**Ends**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

\* 2024/25 List of Classified live Bivalve Mollusc Production areas in Ireland can be accessed here: <https://www.sfpa.ie/Search/resource/2964>

The Classified Areas webpage can be accessed here: <https://www.sfpa.ie/What-We-Do/Molluscan-Shellfish/Classified-Areas>

\*\* Figures are attributed to Bord Iascaigh Mhara

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The Molluscan Shellfish Safety Programme, which included a wide range of stakeholders in Ireland’s LBM Industry, allows for a balanced and robust shellfish monitoring programme in Ireland. A key component is the National Microbiological Monitoring and Classification Programme which is a requirement of European food law. In Ireland, the SFPA is the Competent Authority for the classification of shellfish

areas as part of its statutory remit promoting compliance with sea-fisheries legislation and ensuring seafood safety.

The SFPA carries out an annual review of all shellfish classifications utilising the previous three-year dataset of microbiological results for classifications. *Escherichia coli* (*E.coli*) is used as a proxy or faecal indicator; *E.coli* levels in shellfish samples are used to determine the classification status of production sites and determines the required harvesting protocols. During the period January 2021 to January 2024, approximately 4287 microbiological *E.coli* samples were taken by the SFPA and reviewed.

In addition to the 2024/25 draft review of classified bivalve mollusc production areas in Ireland, a complete list of the *E.coli* results for the review period were forwarded to the Implementation Team involving the SFPA, Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Marine Institute, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, IFA Aquaculture, and Industry. This gives the opportunity for industry to submit cases to potentially waive *E.coli* result which can clearly be shown to be directly caused by exceptional or once off events. These matters are raised at the annual Implementation meeting. The criteria are outlined and detailed in the Code of Practice for the classification of production areas on the SFPA website.

**Table 1. Shellfish Classification based on *E. coli* monitoring**

Classification	Standard per 100g of LBM flesh and intravalvular fluid	Treatment required
A	80% of samples $\leq$ 230 <i>E. coli</i> /100g; all samples must be less than 700 <i>E. coli</i> /100g)	None - molluscs can be harvested for direct human consumption
B	LBM's must not exceed the limits of a five-tube, three dilution Most Probable Number (MPN) test of 4,600 <i>E. coli</i> per 100 g of flesh and intravalvular liquid. <sup>2</sup>	Purification, relaying in class A area or cooking by an approved method
C	LBM's must not exceed the limits of a five-tube, three dilution MPN test of 46,000 <i>E. coli</i> per 100 g of flesh and intravalvular liquid.	Relaying for a long period or cooking by an approved method
Prohibited	>46,000 <i>E. coli</i> per 100g of flesh and intravalvular fluid <sup>3</sup>	Harvesting not permitted

<sup>1</sup> Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/627 Title V Art 53, Regulation (EC) No 853/2004, to Regulation (EC) 2073/2005.

<sup>2</sup> Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/627 Title V Art 54, the competent authority may continue to classify as being of Class B areas for which the relevant limits of 4,600 E. coli per 100g are not exceeded in 90% of samples.

<sup>3</sup>This level is by default as it is above the highest limit set in legislation.

### **About the SFPA**

The Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) is the independent statutory body responsible for the regulation of the sea-fisheries and the sea-food production sectors. It promotes compliance with the EU Common Fisheries Policy, sea-fisheries law and food safety law relating to fish and fish products, verifies compliance and, where necessary, enforces it. Its mandate covers all fishing vessels operating within Ireland's 200-mile limit, over 2,000 Irish registered fishing vessels wherever they operate, and all seafood produced in Ireland's seafood processing companies. The SFPA operates through a network of regional port offices situated at Ireland's main fishery harbours. For further information visit: [www.sfpa.ie](http://www.sfpa.ie)