

safe sustainable seafood

# The Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority's

mission is to enforce Sea Fisheries Conservation legislation and Seafood Safety legislation fairly and consistently to ensure that the marine fish and shellfish resources from the waters around Ireland are exploited sustainably and may be consumed safely for the long-term benefit of all.

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CLASSIFICATION

matters



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Leaflet 4 in the Seafood Safety Matters Series  
from the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority.

# What is Classification?

The classification of shellfish growing waters is a public health protection measure required under Irish and European food safety legislation. Live bivalve molluscs feed by filtering food from the waters in which they grow, therefore any micro-organisms that may be present in the water can become concentrated in their flesh.

Live bivalve molluscs can only be harvested from production areas which have been classified A, B or C according to the quality of the waters from which they are harvested. The areas which have been classified by the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) are listed in the most recent designation order which may be obtained from any of our offices or downloaded from our website at [www.sfpa.ie](http://www.sfpa.ie).

## The Classification Process

The Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority carries out a monthly shellfish sampling programme of all classified production areas. In addition to undertaking some of the analysis, the Marine Institute, as the National Reference Laboratory for monitoring bacteriological and viral contamination of bivalve molluscs, co-ordinates the activities of all laboratories involved in this programme, all of whom must be fully accredited.

The results from these analyses are co-ordinated centrally and this data is used to determine the classification of each area. The microbiological criteria specified in the legislation are:

Classification	Maximum Permitted Limits
<u>Class A:</u>	230 <i>E coli</i> per 100g
<u>Class B:</u>	4,600 <i>E coli</i> per 100g
<u>Class C:</u>	46,000 <i>E coli</i> per 100g



## Harvesting and Sale

Subject to compliance with all other aspects of food safety legislation, including traceability requirements the classification of a production area allows that:

- Shellfish harvested from Class A waters may be sold or supplied directly for human consumption.
- Shellfish harvested from Class B waters may be sold or supplied for human consumption after treatment in a purification centre or after re-laying to meet the required health standards. They may also be sold for human consumption if subjected to appropriate heat treatment.
- Shellfish harvested from Class C waters may be harvested but can only be placed on the market after re-laying over a long period to meet the required health standards and following appropriate heat treatment to ensure elimination of pathogenic micro-organisms.
- In addition to meeting these microbiological criteria, shellfish harvesting may only take place from areas which are afforded 'open' status under the national biotoxin monitoring and control programme. See leaflet 5 (Biotoxin Matters).

For further information see the 'Code of Practice for the Microbiological Monitoring of Bivalve Mollusc Production Areas', which may be obtained from [www.sfpa.ie](http://www.sfpa.ie). This document was produced by The Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority, in conjunction with all stakeholders: The Food Safety Authority of Ireland, The Irish Shellfish Association, The Marine Institute and Bord Iascaigh Mhara.