

Revision to the monitoring of marine biotoxins in live bivalve molluscs in Northern Ireland

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) would like to make stakeholders aware of a revised risk-based official control biotoxin monitoring programme to be implemented across six live bivalve mollusc (LBM) production areas in Northern Ireland from April 2023.

Important

We welcome any additional comments on the revised risk-based official control biotoxin monitoring programme as outlined below. Comments should be provided within two weeks of the date of this publication and any comments received are subject to the same privacy statement as consultations, details of which can be found in our [consultations privacy notice](#).

Comments should be emailed to: executive.support@food.gov.uk

About the biotoxin monitoring programme in Northern Ireland

Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/627 lays down the official control (OC) requirements for the Food Standards Agency (FSA) as Central Competent Authority (CCA) concerning LBMs. These controls include the classification and monitoring of shellfish production and relaying areas, from which the FSA authorises the harvesting of LBMs.

Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/627 Article 61 paragraph 4 states that-

The sampling frequency for toxin analysis in live bivalve molluscs shall be weekly during harvesting periods, except when:

- (a) the sampling frequency may be reduced in specific classified relaying or production areas, or for specific types of live bivalve mollusc, if a risk assessment of toxins or phytoplankton occurrence suggests a very low risk of toxic episodes;
- (b) the sampling frequency shall be increased where such an assessment suggests that weekly sampling would not be sufficient.

Our [consultation on the proposed risk-based approach for the biotoxin monitoring programme in Northern Ireland](#) was published on the FSA website on 4 July 2019 and ran for 8 weeks. As a result of the consultation, a risk-based approach to monitoring marine biotoxins in LBMs was implemented and sampling frequencies were no longer set at regular intervals but influenced by variables such as location, past exceedance and toxin type.

Next steps

The most recent biotoxin risk assessment was completed in November 2022. This assessment used all available data from 2011-2022 for biotoxin sampling across seven Loughs, including weekly data relating to Belfast Lough, Dundrum Bay, Killough, Larne Lough and Strangford Lough

from January 2020 to May 2022.

The frequency of biotoxin monitoring will remain unchanged in Carlingford Lough until January 2024 prior to a further risk assessment being undertaken for this production area.

The revised official control biotoxin monitoring programme will be implemented from 1 April 2023.

This will:

- Aid compliance with regulatory requirements.
- Ensure biotoxin monitoring programmes are risk based.
- Further underpin confidence and assurance in Northern Ireland's LBM industry.

Sampling schedules can still be forecast six months in advance and will be provided by the FSA as normal, however the sampling frequency for a particular production area (Lough) will vary depending on the month and toxin type.

If you require any further information regarding sampling schedules, please contact executive.support@food.gov.uk.

Phytoplankton monitoring frequencies in NI will remain unchanged.

Impact

We consider that the level of impact as a result of the revisions to the official control biotoxin monitoring programme will be extremely low. FSA have engaged with stakeholders who are directly impacted by the revised monitoring programme to advise them of the changes.