

Food Standards Scotland (FSS) Protocol for the Suspension of Sampling and Prioritisation of Resources During COVID-19

1.0 Overview

1.1 This protocol has been formulated as a contingency plan, to provide information on the possible suspension of sampling and prioritisation of resources during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

1.2 Where FSS has been advised that an area is not currently harvesting due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the harvester can request a suspension to **E. coli**, **Biotoxin** and **Phytoplankton** monitoring in the area - entering their area/s into a voluntary 'Suspension' status.

1.3 During this period, all sampling will cease and no commercial harvesting can take place.

1.4 'Suspension' status will allow classified production areas to quickly resume harvesting activity following the period of non-sampling. Details on how to leave 'suspension' status are set out below.

1.5 Each classified area will be dealt with on a case by case basis, through agreement between FSS and the shellfish harvesters.

2.0 Entering 'Suspension' Status

2.1 Where no commercial harvesting is taking place within a classified area, harvesters are required to notify FSS (by email or telephone) of their temporary inactivity. This will enable FSS to formally change the area status and sampling will be temporarily suspended.

Email: shellfish@fss.scot

Telephone: [01224285100](tel:01224285100)

2.2 FSS will email a letter to the harvester, LA, laboratory and sampling officer as confirmation of the area's suspension.

2.3 The classified area/s will be recorded as 'suspended' on the FSS RMP list, highlighting the suspension of the monitoring programmes in that area. This list is distributed on a weekly basis and will inform sampling officers and the laboratories of the following week's sampling requirements in each area.

2.4 No commercial harvesting can take place if an agreement has been reached to suspend sampling. Each area will be dealt with on a case by case basis through agreement between FSS and the shellfish harvesters.

2.5 Please note, where **E. coli** sampling is suspended within an area, FSS have contingencies in place to provide allowances for the 2021/22 shellfish area classification award. However, harvesters are encouraged to carry out their own testing if possible during the 'suspension' period. By signing up to the 'use of harvesters own results' protocol and following the requirements set out within sample results can be provided to FSS and used as evidence towards next year's classification dataset. See link to the harvesters own results protocol below.

2.6 Where the suspension of E. coli sampling has been agreed by FSS and the harvester during the current COVID-19 situation, no area will be penalised in the 2021/22 classification exercise for not meeting the minimum annual sample requirements.

3.0 Removing 'Suspension' status

3.1 The harvester must inform FSS (by email or telephone) of the intention to re-commence commercial harvesting as soon as possible.

3.2 Biotoxin Sampling Requirements

- Where the 'suspended' area is a Biotoxin RMP within a POD and there was no alternate (ALT) RMP to take over sampling duties for that POD, a minimum of **Two biotoxin samples collected at least 7 days apart** are required to be submitted, with test results showing to be <MPL prior to the suspension being lifted and harvesting taking place.
- If the area has recent end product testing (EPT) results that can be provided to FSS, showing no risk of toxins, a minimum of **Two biotoxin samples collected at least 48 hours apart** will be required to be submitted, with test results showing to be <MPL prior to the suspension being lifted and harvesting taking place. (Note - The 48 hour re-test option is also subject to sampling officer and laboratory availability)
- If an associated harvesting area (AHA) within a POD had been selected to continue sampling, acting as the ALT RMP during the original RMP area's 'suspension' period, sampling will cease at the ALT RMP and return to the original RMP.
- In this instance, the area would be free to harvest immediately, as the ALT RMP would have been covering the sampling requirements for the POD.

3.3 E. coli Sampling Requirements

- For classification purposes, routine monthly E. coli sampling will resume once two biotoxin samples <MPL have been submitted as per requirements and the area suspension status has been lifted by FSS.

3.4 Phytoplankton Sampling requirements

- If applicable, Phytoplankton sampling will commence when other sampling is re-instated.

FSS will provide written notification when harvesting can re-commence within an area.

4.0 Use of Harvesters Own Results

4.1 If a harvester requests to suspend sampling within an area, or sampling ceases as a result of delivery/laboratory issues due to COVID-19, FSS encourages harvesters to continue with their own testing where possible, especially in regards to the E.coli monitoring programme.

4.2 In the absence of official control (OC) sampling, FSS will accept harvesters own results if they sign up to the 'use of harvesters own results' protocol and follow the sampling requirements. These sample results will be taken into consideration as part of the annual classification exercise in early 2021.

4.3 More information on the 'use of harvester's own results' protocol can be obtained by contacting FSS on the details provided above, or by visiting the FSS website:

<https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/publications-and-research/publications/use-of-harvesters-own-results>