



Cefas



European Union Reference laboratory for
monitoring bacteriological and viral
contamination of bivalve molluscs

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Adoption of Codex *E. coli* criteria for live bivalve molluscs: paper for discussion at the Member States restricted working group on bivalve molluscs.

Codex *E. coli* criterion for products placed on the market differs from the EU criterion contained in EU food legislation; the Codex criterion is a three class plan ($n=5$, $c=1$, $m=230$ and $M=700$ *E. coli* MPN/100g) whereas the EU criteria (Regulation 2073/2005) is a two class plan ($n=1$, $c=0$, $M=230$ *E. coli* MPN /100g). This has implications for international trade. The EURL has previously examined the comparability of these standards for end-products and concluded that on average, the EU two class plan criterion is more stringent. However, for available pathogen data (*Salmonella*) application of the Codex three class plan for *E. coli* would have only a marginal effect on public health protection with a 0.1% increase in average prevalence in end product compared with the current EU *E. coli* criterion. However, importantly the Codex three class plan approach is more likely to detect non-compliant samples particularly as contamination levels approach the regulatory limit. Following discussion with NRLs, adoption of the Codex approach for end-product testing is considered scientifically preferable and can be recommended – it offers on average broadly equivalent health protection and is more likely to detect non-compliant samples. It does however also have the implication of significantly more testing required to demonstrate compliance (5 samples instead of 1).

However, because the EU criterion for marketed products set out in Regulation 2073/2005 is also the standard required of LBMs harvested from Class A designated production areas in Regulation 854/2004, the impact of adoption of the Codex criterion on harvesting areas classification has also to be considered. A direct application of the Codex criteria to harvest area monitoring would mean a 5 fold increase in the number of samples needed to maintain a classification. The approach agreed at the restricted working group meeting of 21st January 2013 was to separate the end product standard in Regulation 2073/2005 from the harvest area standard in Regulation 854/2004. It was agreed that a possible approach was to adopt standards for Class A production areas that would be comparable to the Codex standards.

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