

Best practice – from lease to market

Commercial shellfish growers need to meet the requirements outlined in the NSW Food Regulation 2025 to ensure their products are safe for human consumption.

Introduction

Bivalve shellfish species, including oysters, mussels and clams, are classified as a high-risk food as they are often eaten raw with the gut intact. To protect the consumer, the NSW Food Authority limits when and where shellfish can be harvested and how they may be distributed to the consumer. The legal requirements for commercial shellfish – including local harvest area management, labelling, storage, and distribution methods to ensure consumer safety – are set out in the NSW Food Regulation 2025, which the Food Authority administers.

Licensing requirements

All shellfish farmers growing or collecting shellfish for sale, including spat farmers, must be licensed with the Food Authority. Vehicles used to distribute or transport stock for sale must also be licensed with the Food Authority. For more information, see [Applying for a food licence](#) on the Food Authority website.

Before harvest

Always check your harvest area is officially ‘open’ prior to harvest by either:

- contacting your local shellfish committee coordinator
- checking your local estuary system (usually a flag or local area message bank system)
- checking the [Harvest area status webpage](#) on the Food Authority website
- contacting the Food Authority’s NSW Shellfish Program team.

Each estuary may have a combination of these information systems and you should check with your local shellfish committee coordinator if in doubt.

The Food Authority distributes SMS messages when a change in harvest area status occurs, however this is **not** to be relied upon, as coordinators may close an area on a weekend and the Food Authority may not be able to send an SMS until Monday morning.

During harvest

Keep accurate records in your Product Record (PR) book of time, date, harvest area, salinity and species of stock you have collected. These records are audited by the NSW Shellfish Program every 6 months.

Back at the sheds

To limit bacterial growth and contamination of stock it is strongly recommended you wash stock with clean water under pressure to remove all mud and silt from the shells.

Keep stock in a clean, dry place which is not affected by sunlight or heat as these will increase bacterial growth in the shellfish. There are also mandatory storage temperature requirements - please refer to the [NSW Shellfish industry manual](#) (PDF, 653 KB) for details.

Additional precautions apply during periods of elevated water and/or air temperature to minimise the risk of a vibriosis outbreak. See the Food Authority's guidance [Vibrio risk management for NSW oyster farmers](#) (PDF, 106 KB) for more information.

Remove all dead stock before distribution. Keep domestic animals away from stock to prevent any contamination.

Depuration and wet storage

Any stock that you depurate or maintain in wet storage must comply with the *NSW Shellfish industry manual*. All shellfish collected from a restricted harvest area must undergo a minimum 36-hour depuration process.

Bagging and labelling

All stock must be placed in clearly labelled, clean bags. Labels must not be able to be easily removed or torn off. Information written on labels or bags must be permanent. This is important in the event you need to recall your stock, for reasons such as high post tests or biotoxin events.

Testing stock prior to sale

Stock that undergoes a depuration process must be tested as per the *NSW shellfish industry manual*. The water used in the depuration tank may also require testing. Please refer to the *manual* for specific requirements.

Product harvested from an approved harvest area does not need to be tested **provided** your local shellfish committee is complying with the harvest area management plan testing regime.

More information

- Refer to the [NSW Shellfish Industry Manual](#) (PDF, 653 KB) and accompanying guidelines
- Visit foodauthority.nsw.gov.au
- Contact the Food Authority helpline:

- Email food.contact@dpird.nsw.gov.au
- Phone 1300 552 406.

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