

NSW Shellfish Program

Harvest and Hold Scheme

1 October 2026

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Summary

The Harvest and Hold Scheme allows shellfish farmers to harvest product in the period between sample collection for an opening and reporting of results. If the final sample results meet the necessary criteria, the harvesting of product may proceed as normal. Otherwise, the product must be returned to the water. For each estuary, eligibility for Harvest and Hold is based on:

- confirmation of satisfactory compliance with a minimum of 90% for each local program.
 - participation in training held by the NSW Food Authority before commencing the scheme.
 - applying to the Food Authority to have individual licences updated to include the permission for Harvest and Hold.
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Background

Extended wet periods when the window of suitable environmental conditions for shellfish harvest is small may place undue operational pressure on industry, particularly during periods of volatile weather conditions. During such periods it is not uncommon for samples to be collected that meet the required standard but due to inclement weather between sample collection and result reporting, the harvest area is prevented from opening. It generally takes 2–3 days between sample collection and reporting of results by accredited laboratories.

The Harvest and Hold Scheme can expand the window of opportunity to harvest product. Under the scheme, authorised shellfish harvesters in approved estuaries that maintain a strong compliance record can harvest product and delay shipping until satisfactory sample results have been reported. If final sample results do not meet the required standard then product must be immediately returned to the water.

To operate under the Harvest and Hold Scheme, approval for each estuary will require a minimum of 90% compliance performance. Harvest and Hold will be revoked if estuary performance drops below 90%. Mandatory training will be held and guidance provided on how the scheme will operate and how applications for licence inclusions can be submitted.

How to apply for Harvest and Hold

Operation under this scheme will only be approved for areas with a minimum 90% compliance rating. Individual licence holders will have to amend their licence to include Harvest and Hold.

Eligible local programs should:

- achieve a majority vote from Local Program members in support of applying to operate under the Harvest and Hold Scheme.
 - submit a written request to the NSW Shellfish Program.
 - communicate with the NSW Shellfish Program and Local Program members to arrange a suitable time to hold the implementation workshop.
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- maintain satisfactory compliance. Local programs that drop below 90% in any year will have harvest and hold revoked for a minimum of 12 months.

Eligible licence holders should:

- attend an implementation training session to learn about the scheme run by the Food Authority for the Local Program area. Attendance is a mandatory part of the application process.
- apply to the Food Authority to have individual licences updated to include the Harvest and Hold permission.

How the Harvest and Hold Scheme works

For Local Programs that are permitted to operate under the Harvest and Hold Scheme, the coordinator should:

- consider the local weather and water conditions prior to sampling. Sampling under the best possible conditions will reduce the likelihood of unacceptable results and the need to return held product to the water.
- sample as per the current requirements. There is no change to how sampling is conducted in harvest areas. Samples must be collected at all sites specified in the harvest area management plan, in accordance with the NSW Shellfish Program Sampling Protocol and by [accredited samplers](#).
- email the Environmental Sample sheet to the NSW Shellfish Program at food.nswsp@dpird.nsw.gov.au.
- phone the NSW Shellfish Program to request an opening for Harvest and Hold.

Once the update to their licence permissions has been approved, individual harvesters should:

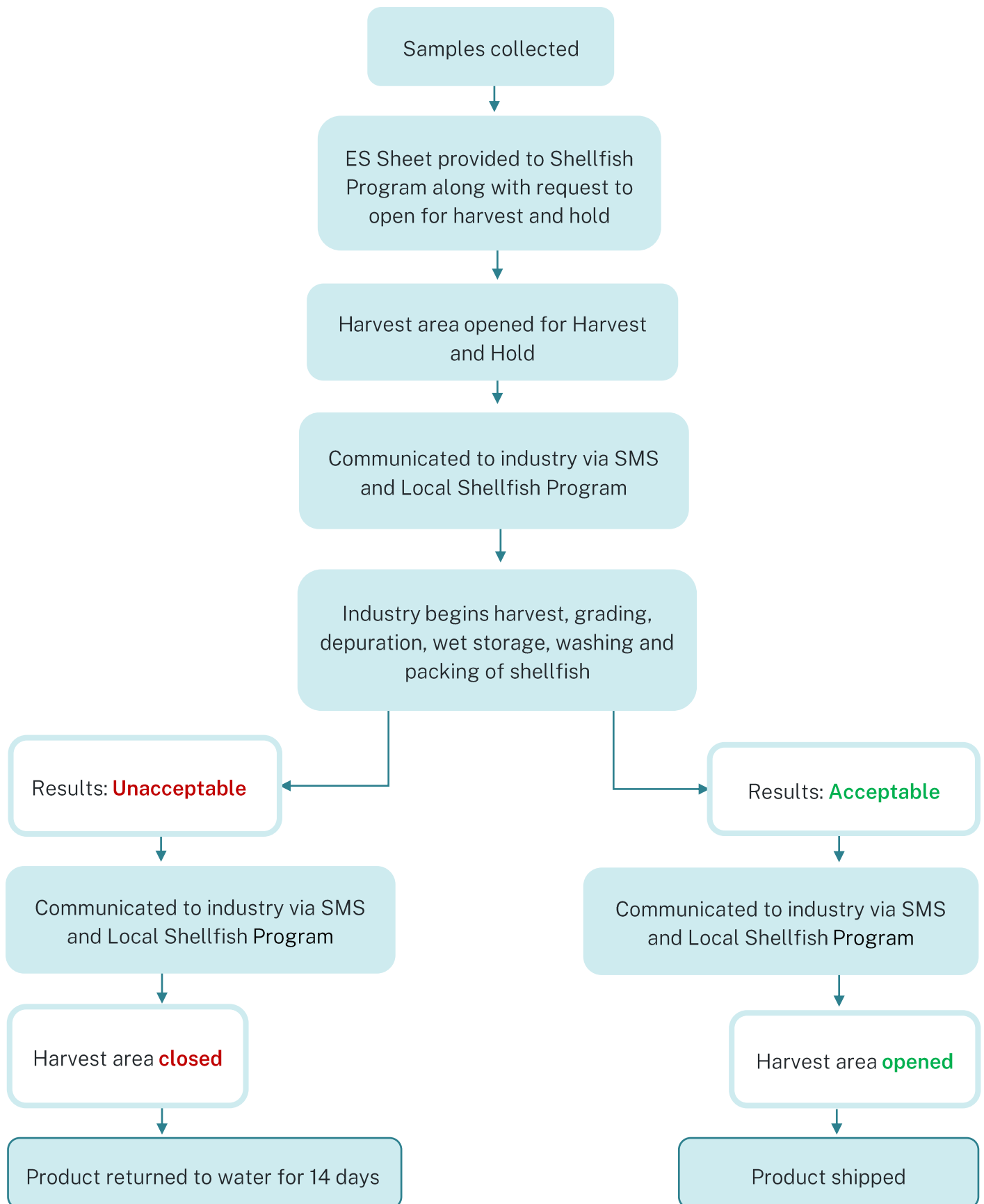
- update their business's food safety program. The Food Safety Program for Farmed Shellfish, which includes the Harvest and Hold Scheme, is available to download from the Food Authority's website.
- confirm the harvest area is open for Harvest and Hold. The Food Authority will approve harvesting and holding of product following notification that sampling has commenced and confirmation of satisfactory salinity levels and sample timing. Approval of an opening for Harvest and Hold will be communicated to the Local Program via regular channels (local coordinator, SMS).
- enter details of harvested product in the Harvested Product Record Book, as per current requirements. Note that a Harvest and Hold edition of the Product Record Book will be provided with the new licence that authorises Harvest and Hold.
- ensure the harvest area is officially open before releasing product. If harvested under Harvest and Hold parameters, stock is held onsite and must not be shipped for sale until a formal opening notice has been issued for the area. Shellfish harvested under the Harvest and Hold scheme must be clearly identified and segregated from other product.
- prepare harvested product for sale. Shellfish may undergo processing including:

- washing
- depuration
- grading
- wet storage
- packing and labelling
- maintain food safety standards as per current requirements within the food safety program, *NSW shellfish industry manual*, the *Food Act 2003 (NSW)* and NSW Food Regulation 2025.
- complete the remaining information (shipping details) in the Harvested Product Record Book when the formal opening notice has been issued by the Food Authority.
- return all product to the water for a minimum period of 14 days, if sample results are unsatisfactory. The harvest area will return to the closed status if the opening samples fail to meet the requirements for harvest area opening, as stipulated in the relevant harvest area management plan.
- record returned product by ticking the 'return to water' check box on the incomplete harvested product record sheet. Submit all product record sheets as per current requirements. Appendix A is provided for you to maintain your own records of returned product.

Licensees who breach the scheme will face compliance action.

For any queries regarding the Harvest and Hold Scheme please call the NSW Shellfish Program on (02) 6552 3000.

Harvest and Hold flowchart



Appendix A – Failed Harvest and Hold – Return of product to water form

Table 1: Failed Harvest and Hold – Return of product to water form

1. Harvest details	
Product Record Number	
Estuary	
Harvest area	
Lease number	
Date of harvest	
Quantity harvested	
Date in depuration tank (if applicable)	
2. Return to water details	
Date area closed	
Estuary product returned to	
Harvest area product returned to	
Lease number product returned to	
Quantity returned to water	
Date of return to water	
Product must be held until (Minimum of 14 days after date returned to water)	

More information

- Visit www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au
 - Contact the Food Authority helpline:
 - Email food.contact@dpird.nsw.gov.au
 - Phone 1300 552 406
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