

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Shellfish Sanitation Program (CSSP) has been developed over the years as a direct result and response to an outbreak of typhoid fever in the United States during the winter of 1924-25. This outbreak involved 1500 cases and 150 deaths and was traced to consumption of contaminated oysters. Canada's concern for its consumers resulted in regulations under the Fish Inspection Act being passed on July 3, 1925 requiring that imported oysters be accompanied by a certificate to show that they were a "safe food product". The States of New York and Massachusetts also extended requirements for certification to all shipments consigned to their markets. The mutual concerns of Canada and the United States to protect the public from the consumption of contaminated bivalve molluscs led to a formal shellfish agreement on April 30, 1948 dealing with sanitary practices prevailing in the shellfish industries of both countries.

Initially, the Department of National Health and Welfare was the designated Canadian agency for administration of the 1948 Memorandum of Agreement between the United States and Canada, and was specifically responsible for: a) paralytic shellfish poison (PSP) bioassays and recommendations for closures; b) certification of the British Columbia Shellfish Program; c) issuance of plant certificates; and d) surveys of shellfish growing areas in the Atlantic Provinces and Quebec. The Department of Fisheries was responsible for: a) the inspection of plants and products; b) management of paralytic shellfish poison control programs in the Atlantic provinces and British Columbia, including the collection of shellfish samples, preparation of shellfish extracts for bioassay and advice to industry and the general public on the hazards; c) inspection of United States imports; d) patrol of closed areas to enforce contamination and PSP closures; e) preparation and promulgation of shellfish closure regulations; and f) land surveys for the installation of shellfish area closure boundary markers.

In 1971, as a result of a reorganization among various government departments, a reassignment of shellfish control responsibilities occurred. Environment Canada (formerly Department of Fisheries and Forestry) assumed operational responsibility for the entire shellfish sanitation program except for the bioassay portion of PSP control which continued to be the responsibility of Health and Welfare Canada. Environment Canada (Fisheries Service) was designated the Canadian agency responsible for honouring the 1948 Canada/U.S. Shellfish Agreement. In addition, Environment Canada assumed the administrative and operational responsibilities for the sanitary control of shellfish growing areas and the harvesting and processing of shellfish in British Columbia.

Environment Canada subsequently became Fisheries and Environment Canada and then a further reorganization in 1979 resulted in the formation of separate departments, Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and Environment Canada. Shellfish control responsibilities were assigned to DFO except for those related to water quality in, and classification of, shellfish growing areas. These latter functions became the responsibility of the newly reorganized Department of the Environment. Health and Welfare Canada's responsibility for the bioassay portion of the paralytic shellfish poison control was incorporated with the responsibilities of DFO in 1988 to further improve necessary closure response times.

The purpose of the Canadian Shellfish Sanitation Program, Manual of Operations is to provide Departmental staff with the policies and procedures to be employed when applying the Fisheries Act, Fish Inspection Act and related regulations governing the control of shellfish growing areas, and the harvesting, processing and distribution of shellfish. It will contribute to uniformity of interpretation and consistency in the application of policies and regulations.

This manual is not intended to be all inclusive. It is to be used in conjunction with other appropriate source materials to provide the interpretation tools required by Departmental officials, inspectors and fishery officers who have enforcement responsibilities under the program. It is meant to be a reference source and not a training manual.

This manual does not contain chemical methods, organoleptic standards for shellfish products or the policies and procedures governing facility inspections. These topics are addressed in other Fisheries and Oceans publications (see DFO 1984, 1986, 1987, 1988, and 1990 in Appendix VI).