

## **Q & A: Oyster Herpesvirus (OsHV-1 $\mu$ var) Outbreak in Kent.**

### **1. What is OsHV-1 $\mu$ var?**

Oyster herpesvirus is a virulent viral disease of the Pacific oyster *Crassostrea gigas* (also known as the rock or cupped oyster). This is the only species of shellfish that is currently known to be susceptible to this virus. The disease is temperature dependent only occurring when water temperatures exceed 16°C. The highest mortalities occur in juvenile oysters, however all life stages are thought to be susceptible to infection.

### **2. Where does it occur?**

Oyster herpesvirus has been found in many parts of the world including the USA, France, Japan and China where it occasionally causes a condition in Pacific oysters called summer mortality. However a new variant of oyster herpesvirus (OsHV-1  $\mu$ var) associated with very high levels of mortality was recognised in France during exceptional mortality events in Pacific oysters in 2008 and 2009. This disease has spread throughout the major oyster growing areas in France, including both the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts, and has also occurred in Jersey and in parts of Ireland.

The outbreak in Whitstable, Kent is the first to occur in GB.

### **3. Why is the disease important?**

The Pacific oyster is the most important species of oyster cultivated in the UK both in terms of volume and value, with an annual production of over 1100 tonnes. Production greatly exceeds that of the native oyster *Ostrea edulis*. Oyster herpesvirus has devastated Pacific oyster production in France, Jersey and in parts of Ireland, and it is important that the disease is contained to prevent its spread to other oyster growing areas in GB.

### **4. Are there any implications for human health?**

No. There are no implications for human health. Oyster herpesvirus only affects Pacific oysters.

### **5. How did the disease get here?**

There are a number of ways in which the disease may have been introduced including through movements of live shellfish for on-growing or for human consumption, or through the transfer of equipment or water. The Fish Health

Inspectorate and Cefas epidemiologists are currently investigating the possible routes of introduction of the disease.

**6. What is being done to control the disease?**

A confirmed designation has been placed on a containment zone in the affected area, and restrictions are in place to restrict the movement of live Pacific oysters into and out of the zone. In addition advice is being given to shellfish farmers and dealers on biosecurity measures to prevent the further spread of the disease. The Fish Health Inspectorate is also examining Pacific oysters from other areas of England and Wales to establish the extent of the infection.

**7. Are other shellfish affected by the disease control measures?**

The controls only apply to Pacific oysters (*Crassostrea gigas*), and movements of other species of shellfish are unaffected by the controls.