

Appendix A

Quality Assurance/Quality Control Assessment -- Inconclusive Sensory Samples

During sensory analysis of the current data set for the MS/AL/FL Nearshore area (grids C13, C17, C21, C24, C27), one of the 123 samples of finfish tested could not be fully assessed in accordance with the re-opening protocol. This sample was taken from a shoal flounder that was collected on August 2, 2010 in Grid C-22.

A panel of seven sensory assessors evaluated the sample. Four of the seven panelists passed the sample. Two of the seven panelists indicated F1 (FAIL) during the cooked flavor step of the sensory evaluation. One of the seven assessors recorded "n/a" on the score sheet, noting decomposition in the descriptive notes.

A quality assurance officer then conducted a Quality Assurance/Quality Control review of the results. The officer evaluated the descriptive notes of all seven panelists, and reviewed the trends of the analysts' skills during the course of all previous and subsequent evaluations. The officer then consulted with the supervisor on duty during the sensory evaluation of the sample, and they determined that the result of the sample was "inconclusive." An inconclusive result means that no decision regarding pass or fail could be made from this sample. Under the reopening protocol, a sample must fail three of seven assessors to fail the sensory analysis. In this case, the two failures are not sufficient information to fail the sample. However, the sample was recorded in the data sheet as "inconclusive" and thus was not used to make a determination on reopening the area. NOAA then moved the sample to chemical analysis in order to confirm whether the levels of contaminants were below the levels of concern.

Following the sensory evaluation, NOAA's chemistry lab tested the tissue from the inconclusive sample of shoal flounder for PAHs using the comprehensive analytical chemistry test. The sample was chemically analyzed as part of a composite. The resulting concentrations of PAHs in the composite sample were comparable to those in other samples from the same area that passed the chemical analysis test. Moreover, the results were well below the levels of concern in the reopening protocol. The chemical analysis result conclusively demonstrated that the sample is not contaminated by oil and supported the conclusion in the sensory analysis that samples from the grid are not tainted with oil from the DWH spill. Therefore, NOAA determined that the sample passed the chemical test.