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News release

Waiheke Exotic Caulerpa - 2 weeks on

Two weeks ago the invasive Exotic Caulerpa seaweed was discovered near Thompson's Point on Waiheke's Northern coastline. A Waiheke Marine Project (WMP) crew, which included Ngāti Paoa ki Waiheke (NPKW) and underwater drone operators Logan Marine, found the alarming examples during the 3rd planned survey in late July.

In the heady days that followed, confirmation of the identification arrived and then a dive team tasked by WMP with gathering more detailed photography examined the site. In early August MPI's contracted NIWA dive team checked the area and expanded on the initial WMP transects in an attempt to locate the edges of the Caulerpa plants and help define the size of the challenge ahead. Exotic caulerpa was not found on the dives West of Nani island but was found in the Thompson's Point area. This includes Opopoto Bay and Woodlands Bay, both in the greater Onetangi Bay area. WMP is encouraging the community to avoid these areas, especially for fishing, anchoring and diving to reduce the risk of spreading this unwelcome weed.

Exotic Caulerpa competes with native species for light and takes over the home of other sea creatures leading to a loss of biodiversity and displacement. It spreads extremely easily with only the tiniest fragment being able to grow in its new location. The communities of Aotea Great Barrier, Ahu Ahu - Great Mercury, Te Kawau Tūmaro ō Toi - Kawau Island, and Omākiwi Cove in the Bay of Islands are all dealing with the unwanted arrival of exotic Caulerpa. Waiheke Island is showing that a deliberate surveillance programme is key to early detection and will help to get a head start on eradication.

In recent days suitable weather has allowed WMP to continue with its surveillance using two boats, conducting a further 54 ROV transects over two days and getting 4 divers in the water for close observation of the invasive seaweed. This mahi is leading to a growing understanding of the spread and density in these initial discovery areas in collaboration with MPI and Auckland Council. Next, a dive crew from the Pou Rāhui project of Ngāti Paoa Iwi Trust will bring the power of mātauranga Māori to this significant challenge which threatens the restoration and healing of Tīkapa Moana - Hauraki Gulf with likely ongoing consequences.

Efforts to define the extent of the incursion are far from over and ongoing discussions of treatment options at various possible scales continues, however the participants have been energized by international experts from California (visiting as part of Ngāti Manuhiri's Combat Caulerpa roadshow, Te Wero Nui). Whilst this discovery of exotic caulerpa is formidable, with well resourced collaborative and decisive action the aim is to push forward on the basis that eradication is possible.

WMP will be adding a more detailed Caulerpa update to its community presentation of the 2023 kōura/crayfish survey results on Sunday 20th August, 10:30am at Piritahi Marae - all are welcome by RSVP to koura@waihekemarineproject.org.

If you think you've spotted Exotic Caulerpa, please note the location, take a photo and report it to Biosecurity New Zealand on 0800 80 99 66 or by completing the online reporting form at report.mpi.govt.nz

Please go to <https://www.waihekemarineproject.org/marinemonitoring> for more details.