



13 September 2023

News release

Waiheke Exotic Caulerpa - 6 weeks & growing

Just over 6 weeks ago, the invasive Exotic Caulerpa seaweed was discovered near Thompson's Point on Waiheke's Northern coastline. In these 6 weeks this unwanted weed has likely to have continued its creep over Waiheke's seabed despite the cooler season's discouraging water temperature.

Exotic Caulerpa has been detected in 3 main zones on Waiheke's Northern coast and an understanding of the extent and nature of the invasion is growing as well. Diving teams and underwater drone work have found varying sparse examples outside of these primary denser sites however concerns at the repercussions for Tikapa moana and for our communities are far from having been allayed.

The Waiheke Marine Project (WMP) crew, which included Ngāti Paoa ki Waiheke (NPKW) and underwater drone operator Logan Marine, made the initial alarming discovery in late July. In late August, the Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) contracted the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) for 3 more diving days. Their mahi included an inspection of the known sites at both sides of Thompson's point, and in Onetangi at Opopoto, Pie Melon Bay and Woodlands Bays. Several sparse detections were also made across the bay itself in about 8 metres of water depth - just out from the beach. Continuing around the island with spot dives, the team fortunately did not detect Exotic Caulerpa in other locations.

Adding to this collaboration, two ROV survey days (1st and 9th September) by WMP and Logan Marine have been conducted for the Department of Conservation (DOC) in the Te Matuku Marine Reserve area on Waiheke's Southern coast. No Exotic Caulerpa was detected in the 44 transects completed - the results are being analysed now, to produce a full report.

Earlier in August Ngāti Paoa Iwi Trust laid a rāhui on an area between Mawhitipana Bay and just beyond Onetangi Bay and are working with MPI on a treatment plan with urgency.

WMP encourages the avoidance of the incursion area, particularly with any activity that has seafloor contact such as fishing, anchoring and diving as this may dislodge small fragments.

To help raise awareness of this threat, team members are engaging with clubs, visitors and residents. Existing connections with neighboring groups are being nurtured as we face together the challenge brought by this pest and its interruption of the amenity and the creatures of the sea.

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 proactive surveillance programme is key to early detection and this will help to get a head start on eradication.

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.

If the sample is not too big, bag it and take it home to land for hot composting or rubbish disposal. Please wash your hands and anything having contact with the weed with a biosafe detergent after disposal.

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

Contact us - team@waihekemarineproject.org