



14 May 2010

Tests clear Twofold Bay of exotic sea squirt invasion

Twofold Bay near Eden has been cleared of hosting Australia's first outbreak of the exotic marine pest commonly known as invasive colonial sea squirt, Minister for Primary Industries, Steve Whan, said today.

"Results from a number of independently conducted tests have all concluded that the samples collected from Twofold Bay are not the invasive colonial sea squirt, *Didemnum vexillum*," Minister Whan said.

"Initial identification advice received in March suggested that the colony might be the same species of invasive sea squirt that has had a devastating impact on the marine environment in New Zealand and other countries.

"Fortunately genetic testing has shown that the species in Twofold Bay is a non-invasive species of sea squirt and that no eradication measures will need to be implemented."

A routine annual inspection of Twofold Bay in March by underwater divers revealed the suspect invasive colonial sea squirt infestation on the multi-purpose wharf in Twofold Bay.

As a precaution, emergency response procedures were implemented to ensure that the infestation did not spread, while also ensuring that business could continue as normal in the Bay.

Sea squirts are extremely difficult to identify as they are very similar in appearance. In response to the suspect outbreak, Industry & Investment NSW scientists from the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute developed a DNA test to provide additional confirmation of the identity of the organism present in Twofold Bay.

"I thank the community of Eden and users of Twofold Bay for their cooperation with the emergency response plan and movement restrictions that were put in place to prevent the spread of the suspect sea squirt," Minister Whan said.

"Invasive colonial sea squirt is a marine pest of national concern which has the potential to devastate marine fish habitats and smother local mussel and oyster stocks.

"As an outbreak of this invasive colonial sea squirt has never been recorded in Australia, it is extremely important that any suspect infestation is taken seriously until proven otherwise.

"This suspect case of invasive colonial sea squirt has provided a reminder of the importance of hygiene in and around the water to prevent the spread of aquatic pests.

"Unwanted hitchhikers can be prevented by avoiding recognised infestation areas and keeping boats free of fouling by applying a suitable antifouling paint.

"Trailers, boats, and all gear including anchors, ropes and chains should be checked and cleaned inside and out in an area away from water bodies."

Water users who find what they believe may be an aquatic species not native to the area are asked to take a photo if possible and report its location promptly to your local Fisheries Office or email aquatic.pests@industry.nsw.gov.au.

For more information visit www.industry.nsw.gov.au/info/seasquirt.