



Minister Steve Whan
Minister for Primary Industries
Minister for Emergency Services
Minister for Rural Affairs

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, 23 March, 2010

Invader Sea Squirt no joke for NSW Far South Coast

Industry & Investment (I&I) NSW officers have launched an investigation into a suspected outbreak of a devastating exotic marine pest on the NSW Far South Coast, NSW Primary Industries Minister, Steve Whan, said today.

“*Didemnum vexillum* (Sea Squirt) is an exotic aquatic pest, which has the potential to impact on infrastructure, marine fish habitats, and smother local mussel and oyster stocks,” Minister Whan said.

“A routine annual inspection of Twofold Bay, in Eden by underwater divers for the Department of Defence earlier this month, revealed suspected Sea Squirt infestations on the main wharf in the bay.

“The Sea Squirt forms large spongy clumps and can generally be recognised by its distinctive orange/yellow colour.

“Preliminary identification of the sea squirt collected in Twofold Bay indicates that it is the marine pest *Didemnum vexillum*, which has been known to invade a number of countries, including New Zealand and the United States.

“However, there are several native sea squirt species, that look superficially similar to *Didemnum vexillum*, and as such, genetic samples have been sent to a New Zealand laboratory for final confirmation.

“Sea squirt is a marine pest which is easily spread, and an outbreak has not been known to occur in NSW before.

“I&I NSW is now gathering information from New Zealand and the United States on the species’ biology and possible control methods.

“Industry & Investment NSW officers are working in conjunction with Department of Defence and the national Consultative Committee on Introduced Marine Pest Emergencies (CCIMPE), as well as NSW Maritime and local stakeholders to determine the potential extent of the spread of Sea Squirt on other local infrastructure and other amenities, and develop possible eradication and/or control options.”

To prevent the spread of this potential exotic pest, water users should inspect anchors, ropes and chains before leaving the area and dispose of any unusual plants or animals in a bin.

When diving or fishing in marine waters, keep a lookout for new species.

While the extent of this potential pest incursion is being investigated, I&I NSW discourages all unnecessary vessel movements in Twofold Bay, in particular at or in the near vicinity of the wharves.

If you find what you believe is a species which you suspect is not native to the area, freeze it whole or take a photo and report it to aquatic.pests@industry.nsw.gov.au

For more information on Sea Squirt, visit www.industry.nsw.gov.au/info/seasquirt