

## **Mediterranean fanworm (*Sabella spallanzanii*) Questions and Answers**

### **What is the Mediterranean fanworm?**

The fanworm is a marine tube worm that attaches to hard underwater surfaces and builds itself a sandy/leathery tube in which it lives. It protrudes from this tube when filter feeding from the water, and withdraws into it when disturbed. This particular fanworm can grow to approximately 40cm in length. Full information about it, including pictures, is at:

<http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/pests/mediterranean-fanworm>

### **What are its impacts?**

The Mediterranean fanworm can form dense populations, potentially out-competing native species for space and food, and may pose a nuisance for aquaculture operations. MAFBNZ attempted the elimination in Lyttelton as a precautionary measure as there is uncertainty around how it would behave in the New Zealand environment. Overseas experience had found the species to be fast growing and invasive.

### **What did the Lyttelton programme involve?**

The programme involved rounds of treatment by dive teams whereby all piles and structures in the inner Lyttelton harbour were thoroughly inspected, and where specimens of the fanworm were detected, they were removed. The aim was to reduce the population of the fanworm in the port to a level where it could no longer reproduce and sustain itself. Since the first detection of the Mediterranean fanworm in March 2008, divers have searched the more than 6,000 wharf piles in Lyttelton Port at least twice each, removing a total of 344 fanworms.

In between treatment rounds, regular marine surveillance of the port area was also carried out.

### **How much did this work cost?**

Up until the treatment was put on hold following the discovery of the wider Waitemata population, approximately \$1.3 million of the allocated \$3.5 million had been spent.

### **Was this money wasted?**

No. The money was committed at the time because it was considered that an attempt to eliminate the pest was feasible and responsible. When it became evident that we could no longer contain the fanworm in New Zealand, we re-considered the programme. While it was not successful in eliminating the fanworm, the Lyttelton programme provided useful marine biosecurity knowledge and evidence that the treatment method employed could be used again where a marine pest presents in a small number in a contained area. The information gained may well help us plan for an eradication of a marine pest in, for example, a very high-value site (such as a marine reserve or a marine farming area).

### **Did the fanworm spread from Lyttelton to Auckland?**

We will never know for sure, but the age of the worms found in the Waitemata indicates that the Auckland population possibly pre-dated the Lyttelton group.

### **Why is it not feasible to have a go at eliminating this pest from the Waitemata?**

The projected costs of extending the elimination to such a widespread geographical area were simply not justified by the known impacts. It would also be extremely difficult to locate and remove the



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fanworms using divers from an area that is over 10,000 hectares in area. By comparison, the Lyttelton Port area is around 50 hectares in area.

**Why has it taken nearly six months from the find in the wider Waitemata to make this decision?**

The decision has not been taken lightly and has required careful consideration of the conservation issues at stake, balanced against the financial information. All this has been compounded by the uncertainty around the actual impacts on the New Zealand environment. We know the species has proved invasive overseas, but we had no real certainty around how it would behave in New Zealand waters.

**Does this situation mean future marine response actions will be limited?**

MAFBNZ will continue to respond to marine pest detections based on sound risk analysis and the feasibility of any eradication attempt. We will continue, through our targeted marine pest surveillance, to look out for those pests that we know could have serious impacts on New Zealand's economy or environment. The earlier populations can be found, the greater the opportunity to treat them.

**How can the public help?**

We ask those who work and play in and around the marine environment to keep an eye out for anything unusual they may find in the ocean or on the waterfront. Such finds can be reported to 0800 80 99 66. Again, early detection affords a greater opportunity to eradicate.

Those who own boats have a particular role to play in ensuring they don't transport marine fouling pests from one location to another. This can be prevented by ensuring boat hulls are kept clean (with no more than a light slime layer on board) and thoroughly antifouled.