

# **Destructive Seaweed Threatens California**

*Caulerpa taxifolia*



**If you see it,  
immediately report it,  
but DO NOT disturb it!**

# At Risk:

## Why the concern?

Although the marine (saltwater) seaweed *Caulerpa taxifolia*, also known as "killer algae", poses no threat to human health, it will have devastating ecological and economic consequences for California if it is allowed to become permanently established. This non-native seaweed threatens California's coastal marine life, including kelp forests and their related fish, marine mammals, and sea birds.

*Caulerpa taxifolia* has the ability to form a dense smothering blanket of growth on any surface (rock, sand, or mud). It is capable of extremely rapid growth—up to one inch per day. Any small fragment of this seaweed has the potential to start a new colony, which can expand to cover more than 75 square feet within one year. It can grow in shallow coastal lagoons as well as in deeper ocean waters, and has reportedly survived for up to ten days out of water.

Because of these characteristics, an infestation of *Caulerpa taxifolia* can quickly become uncontrollable.

# All Coastal I

## What does it look like?

*Caulerpa taxifolia* has a brilliant (almost fluorescent) green color and grows in the form of flat, leafy (fern-like) fronds that extend upward from each main stem (see photograph below). Each stem can grow to nine feet in length and have up to 200 fronds. This algae can be found as individual plants or in dense blankets that may cover many acres. Do not be deceived by its attractive appearance!

For more information, visit:

<http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/hcd/caulerpa.htm>



# Marine Life!

## Where has it invaded?

*Caulerpa taxifolia* has invaded the Mediterranean Sea, with devastating results. Many marine scientists have concluded that it is too late to save the Mediterranean coastline from this destructive seaweed. Genetic work suggests that all *Caulerpa taxifolia* plants in the Mediterranean are clones of a single plant released from an aquarium in 1984. This seaweed has recently been discovered near Sydney, Australia, and now in California.

## How does it spread?

Despite restrictions on its possession, transport, and/or sale, *Caulerpa taxifolia* continues to be part of the aquarium trade. The recent infestation in San Diego County is believed to have resulted from a release from a home saltwater aquarium.

Dispersal of *Caulerpa taxifolia* throughout the Mediterranean is believed to be primarily attributable to fishing gear, boat anchors and anchor lines.



## How can it be stopped?

- Early detection of all infestations
- Prompt containment
- Effective eradication
- Prevention of new infestations

## What YOU can do . . .

- Learn to recognize this seaweed.
- Report all sightings of *Caulerpa taxifolia* to one of the resource agencies listed on the back of this brochure. DO NOT disturb the seaweed since even a tiny piece can regenerate a new plant and spread the infestation.
- Look for pieces of this seaweed on:
  - your boating equipment**  
(propellers, rudders, anchoring gear)
  - your marine sports equipment**  
(fishing, snorkeling, scuba, and skiing)
- If Found:** Remove it, Bag it, & Report it.
- DO NOT use this seaweed in your aquarium.
- DO NOT release any water, plants, or animals from a saltwater aquarium into a street, storm drain, creek, bay, lagoon, or the ocean.

# Your help is needed!

Your help is critical to the success of California's effort to eradicate and prevent further infestation by this destructive marine seaweed.

If you find any of this seaweed **anywhere** (in the water, along the shoreline, or on your watercraft or fishing gear), please contact one of the agencies listed below and provide the following information:

- Where you found it (including significant landmarks and water depth)
- Your name, telephone number, and Email address

National Marine Fisheries Service  
(562)980-4043 • [bob.hoffman@noaa.gov](mailto:bob.hoffman@noaa.gov)

California Dept. of Fish and Game  
(858)467-4218 • [wpaznokas@dfg.ca.gov](mailto:wpaznokas@dfg.ca.gov)

SD Regional Water Quality Control Board  
(858)467-2952 • [peteg@rb9.swrcb.ca.gov](mailto:peteg@rb9.swrcb.ca.gov)

**Thank you for your assistance!**