

Report this pest



# Exotic caulerpa

Marine Pest

## Why is it a pest?

Exotic caulerpa are highly invasive seaweed species that form dense underwater fields, smothering the seafloor and outcompeting native species for space.

They can disrupt local ecosystems, crowding out important marine life like sponges, mussels, scallops, and even native *Caulerpa* species.

These seaweed species pose significant risks to recreational, cultural, and commercial marine activities. Once established, they are challenging to remove and can spread easily through fragmentation.

Exotic caulerpa have spread rapidly from only a few known sites to areas such as Great Barrier Island and other parts of the northern North Island. There are no known locations of *Caulerpa* in the South Island, and due to its temperature limits, it is very unlikely to establish here.



## What does it look like?

- **Size:** Fronds (leaves) grow up to 10 centimetres long.
- **Appearance:** Green fronds shaped like oar blades, rising from long, horizontal runners (called stolons) that can reach up to nine metres long.
- **Distinctive features:** Fronds resemble oar blades. Exotic caulerpa creates dense underwater fields where nothing else can grow.
- **Similar species:** Looks similar to native seaweeds but has a distinctive oar blade-shaped frond.
- **Habitat:** Grows between 2 and 35 metres below the tideline on both hard surfaces and sandy areas. Found in both shallow and deeper waters, often forming dense mats that can extend up to 40 metres deep.

### Common name:

Exotic caulerpa

### Scientific name:

*Caulerpa brachypus* /  
*Caulerpa parvifolia*

### Management programme:

Unwanted organism

An unwanted organism is not managed under the ORC Pest Plan but may be controlled as part of our Biosecurity Strategy.



**Report  
this pest!**

If you have seen or suspect the presence of this pest, you **must report** the sighting to us at [orc.govt.nz/reportpests](https://orc.govt.nz/reportpests)

# When can I spot it best?

Late spring to early autumn (October to April).

These *Caulerpa* species thrive in warm water conditions, which promote rapid growth and expansion of their mats. During these months, their bright green fronds are more developed and visible, making detection easier.

# What are the rules?

It is an offence to breed, knowingly communicate, exhibit, multiply, propagate, release, or sell, an unwanted organism (Biosecurity Act 1993).

# What should I do?

ORC is currently developing a marine biosecurity programme and needs to obtain more information on species distributions before pursuing management options. If you think you have spotted exotic caulerpa, please report it.

**Preventing the spread of exotic caulerpa** is the best strategy, as removal of invasive marine pests is both difficult and expensive.

Cleaning your craft and gear for biosecurity purposes is an important way to help protect the marine environment. Just as regular maintenance keeps your equipment in good condition, biosecurity cleaning keeps the ocean healthy for everyone.

## The three main types of marine biosecurity cleaning for boaties are:

### For all boats

- Check and clean your gear and anchor, and remove any on-board water before moving to another waterbody.

### For trailer boats

- Clean your boat thoroughly when you get home.

### For moored boats

- Regularly clean off slime and maintain your antifouling.

**Report this pest**



# Help us find exotic caulerpa

You must notify Otago Regional Council if you suspect the presence of this pest.

**If you think you've seen it:**



**Note the location**



**Take a photo**  
(if possible)



**Report this pest**  
at [orc.govt.nz/reportpests](https://orc.govt.nz/reportpests)

For more information, visit [orc.govt.nz/exoticcaulerpa](https://orc.govt.nz/exoticcaulerpa)

