



# Media Release

## **Divers are removing invasive algae species from Newport Bay**

### ***Water Boards are part of multi-agency effort***

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**SACRAMENTO** – As part of an ongoing multi-agency effort to eradicate an invasive algae species in Newport Bay, the State Water Resources Control Board is providing funds for divers to remove the infestation and pump the material into containers onshore.

The removal process is expected to continue through the week.

*Caulerpa prolifera*, a bright green plant native to Florida and tropical locales, is not harmful to humans but can spread quickly, choking native seaweeds and threatening marine life through lost habitat. While the source of the infestation is unknown, it likely was caused by saltwater dumped from an aquarium directly into the bay or a storm drain or channel that discharges to the site.

When the algae was identified in March on the north end of the Newport Bay entrance channel in China Cove, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) scientists and divers mapped the location and surveyed the extent of the problem. The Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board obtained funding from the State Water Board's Division of Financial Assistance Cleanup and Abatement Account and awarded Merkel & Associates a \$308,000 contract to conduct surveys and remove the plant. The firm will also inspect the area before and after the cleanup to ensure the species does not repopulate the area.

Scientific consensus indicated that immediate steps were necessary to address the infestation. China Cove experiences strong currents, tidal water movement and swells, which can rapidly spread *Caulerpa prolifera* and its close relatives, overwhelming native species, including eelgrass. In 2000, *Caulerpa taxifolia* invaded Huntington Harbor and Agua Hedionda Lagoon near San Diego. A multi-agency partnership spent more than \$7 million over six years to finally eradicate the species in 2006.



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

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“It was imperative that we received the initial funding to start the removal process in Newport Bay,” said Hope Smythe, executive officer of the Santa Ana Water Board. “No one wants to see a repeat of what happened in the Huntington Harbor and Agua Hedionda Lagoon. But we also are aware that it may take several years and additional funds before we can determine whether or not the species has been eradicated from our coastal areas.”

To prevent disturbance during the removal process by boat anchors, boat wakes, divers or swimmers, Newport Beach officials are limiting access to the area with floating buoys and lines.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service also will fund future diver surveys in the bay and coves to the southeast, including the Crystal Cove State Marine Protected Area.

The Southern California Caulerpa Action Team (SCCAT), a combination of state, local and federal entities formed to address the Newport Bay infestation, includes representatives from the Santa Ana Water Board, Department of Fish and Wildlife, California State Lands Commission, California Coastal Commission, NOAA National Marine Fisheries, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the City of Newport Beach. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also is participating to ensure the dredging in the federal portions of the bay’s entrance channel does not intrude into the infested area.

For more information or to report a suspected sighting of the plant, please visit the CDFW’s [Invasive Algae-Caulerpa prolifera](#) web page.

*The Santa Ana region, which covers 2,800 miles from the San Bernardino and San Gabriel mountains to the north and east of Newport Bay, has a population of five million people and is among the state’s most rapidly growing areas. The semi-arid region is known for its temperate climate and relatively low rainfall.*