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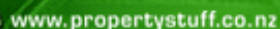
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## ENVIRONMENT STORY

**Minister promises response on sea squirt fight**

05 July 2006

**Biosecurity Minister Jim Anderton has promised to respond within a fortnight to a request from the Marlborough District Council and the marine farming industry for Government assistance to control Didemnum vexillum sea squirt.**

A delegation of Marlborough District Council and marine farming representatives went to Wellington on Monday to meet with the minister.

The delegation included Marlborough mayor Alistair Sowman, council rural services manager Alan Johnson, New Zealand Marine Farming Association president Rob Pooley and Didemnum Working Group chairman Graeme Coates.

Mr Sowman said the meeting was "very positive".

"The Minister was certainly concerned at the possible impact of the spread of the sea squirt and was impressed that the council and marine farming industry are working together to control its spread. He also acknowledged the need to act now, because we have to do our utmost to manage the problem before the spawning season that will accompany the warmer weather from September onwards."

The meeting in followed a visit to Marlborough late last week by Biosecurity officials to discuss the sea squirt issue and inspect affected areas.

A briefing paper for the Minister said farmed mussels were New Zealand's second most valued seafood export, earning \$166 million this year, with three-quarters of them grown in Marlborough, providing 2000 full-time jobs in the district.

Mr Coates said that while the marine farming industry was putting a lot of resources and effort into managing the sea squirt, the issue was not just an industry matter.

"There's a significant amount of public good involved, including the effect on public amenities and tourism if it spreads to wharfs, beaches and recreational boating facilities. It also poses a threat to areas of high natural importance such as the Tonga Island, Whakapuaka and Long Island marine reserves."

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