



California Environmental Protection Agency
STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD



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News Release

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Agency Contacts Listed at End of News Release

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Caulerpa Taxifolia Eradication – Officials Proclaim Victory Over “Killer Algae” But Remain Vigilant to New Sightings

CARLSBAD, Calif. – Governmental agencies and community-based environmental organizations came together today to celebrate the successful eradication of the invasive seaweed, *Caulerpa taxifolia*, from the two locations where it was detected nearly six years ago. The algae, first detected in Agua Hedionda Lagoon (near San Diego) and Huntington Harbour (near Los Angeles) in 2000, is one of only a few known eradications of an invasive marine alga species.

Caulerpa taxifolia, also referred to as “killer algae” because of its ability to devastate and overwhelm underwater ecosystems, was popular in home aquariums and likely introduced accidentally into California's waters several years ago. Legislation in 2001 made it illegal to sell, possess, or transfer *Caulerpa taxifolia* and eight other similar looking *Caulerpa* species in California. In other parts of the world, especially the Mediterranean Sea, *Caulerpa taxifolia* has rapidly, and permanently, displaced native marine plants and animals.

“The proliferation of *Caulerpa* in these waters would have irreversibly changed the ecosystem in California’s near-shore coastal environment,” said Tim Keeney, NOAA’s Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere. “It was only through the rapid response and cooperative efforts of organizations at all levels that we were successful in preventing an ecological crisis.”

The Southern California Caulerpa Action Team (SCCAT) immediately formed following discovery of the seaweed in 2000, to develop a plan to eradicate it from the two known infestation locations. The team is composed of a number of agencies and organizations including the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service), San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board, Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board, California Department of Fish and Game (DFG), the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Agua Hedionda Lagoon Foundation and Merkel & Associates, the program’s eradication contractor. The cooperative nature and scientific response utilized by SCCAT is being viewed as an effective model for the eradication of invasive species.

“Invasive species can be like oil spills that reproduce, and can cause great environmental and economic harm,” said DFG Director Ryan Broddrick. “Eradicating this harmful marine alga took quick action, collaboration and hard work from dedicated professionals and volunteers. The Southern California Caulerpa Action Team helped make this a success and a model for future actions of this kind.”

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Officials continue to be concerned about possible outbreaks of the algae in other coastal areas and stress that it is vitally important to continue surveillance efforts throughout California and other susceptible coastal waters to ensure that other infestation sites do not exist. Sustained public education is essential to ensure there are no further introductions of this banned invasive species from home aquariums into our waterways.

Still, the members of SCCAT are relieved that this eradication effort was successful and hope they will not need to convene the team at a later date.

“Agua Hedionda Lagoon Foundation is pleased to host the celebration of the eradication of *Caulerpa taxifolia*,” said Craig Elliott of the Agua Hedionda Lagoon Foundation. “The Foundation will honor its mission of caring for the lagoon by continuing to support educational programs promoting awareness of the menace of invasive species and encouraging lagoon users to watch for evidence of new infestations of *Caulerpa*.”

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On the Web

Southern California Caulerpa Action Team

<http://www.sccat.net>

San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board

<http://www.caulerpa.cjb.net>

Caulerpa taxifolia: The “killer algae” is in Southern California – UC Davis

<http://www.ridnis.ucdavis.edu/Caulerpataxifolia.html>

Agua Hedionda Lagoon Foundation

<http://www.aguahedionda.org/AHLFhomepage3.htm>

NOAA Fisheries Service Southwest Region

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