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## ENVIRONMENT STORY

## Wrap and vinegar to the rescue

14 July 2006

By HELEN MURDOCH

### Plastic silage wrapping and household vinegar are successfully being used to control invasive sea squirt through the Marlborough Sounds and in Golden Bay.

The New Zealand Mussel Industry has bankrolled the programme, which is costing hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The news comes a week after Biosecurity Minister Jim Anderton all but ruled out any attempt to eradicate the squirt in the top of the South Island because of the extent of its spread.

The simple tools were developed by the mussel industry and Nelson's Cawthron Institute and have successfully been used to almost eradicate a recently discovered infestation of the sea squirt, *Didemnum vexillum*, in Golden Bay's Port Tarakohe harbour.

Sea squirt has been found at eight sites in Queen Charlotte Sound, Golden Bay, Tauranga and Whangamata.

The pest smothers marine structures and poses a huge concern to the \$166 million mussel export industry.

Cawthron marine biosecurity scientist Ashley Coutts said vinegar effectively killed marine pests and plastic wrapping suffocated plant marine pests.

A combination of the two was effective on high use structures, which could not be removed from the water, like wharf piles, he said.

The process had been developed over the past four years and was now also being used in Hawaii, to control invasive coral, and in mainland United States.

It was not guaranteed to eradicate sea squirt, but would contain it and keep it out of high value areas.

"We have to choose our battles and investigate scenarios where we have a probability of success," said Coutts.

A six-week programme to control sea squirt in the Marlborough Sounds got under way this week.

Coutts said its timing was crucial so the squirt could be killed before it spawned in early summer.

The unique and simple control technique showed that while not all invasive pests were stopped at the border, some could be contained from spreading into sensitive areas.

Marlborough Mussels research and development manager, and project leader for the Marlborough didemnum clean-up, Aaron Pannell, said two teams of four divers had started working their way through infested

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areas in Marlborough Sounds.

"It's pretty vital that we try to contain it. If we don't and it gets into Pelorous Sound, where 90 per cent of the mussel farms are, it could be devastating."

Pannell said the industry could not wait for Biosecurity New Zealand to act.

"They understand our position and are working out what can be done to help. But this is about the industry being proactive and getting out and doing it ourselves."

The industry had high hopes that the Golden Bay infestation, discovered early last month, would be eradicated.

Dorje Strang, didemnum project leader for Port Tarakohe, said a monitoring dive on Tuesday found 98% of the sea squirt had been killed by the new technique.

The port project had cost marine farmers between \$25,000 and \$30,000 but was vital if the pest was to be controlled before spring spawning, he said.

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