

20. SEA LETTUCE BUILD-UP AND REMOVAL IN THE AVON/HEATHCOTE ESTUARY

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The purpose of this report is to inform the Board of sea lettuce problems in the Avon/Heathcote Estuary over the Christmas period, the action taken in response and the current situation. This report has been referred to the Hagley/Ferrymead Community Board also.

This year has seen a good growth of sea lettuce in the Christchurch Estuary. It was evident that a southerly blow would eventually bring the vegetative material ashore somewhere and create a smelly offensive problem. This situation occurred at Southshore over the Christmas period.

After New Year a number of calls were received from concerned residents whose properties front the Estuary in the Southshore area. They were complaining about the offensive smell from the recent build-up of sea lettuce outside their properties, mainly in the Penguin Street to Plover Street area.

An inspection of the area on 3 January found a moderate build up (compared to recent years) of sea lettuce from Tern Street to Penguin Street. The area to the north, from Penguin Street to Ebbtide Street, had a relatively light and patchy build up, although possibly still as smelly. This situation differed from the past two years when build-ups were concentrated in the Ebbtide-Godwit Street area.

It was decided to action our resource consent, for vehicle access to the Estuary at Southshore, and carry out a clean up of the worst areas of the Estuary foreshore, from Tern Street to Penguin Street. Notification was given to the residents who had enquired initially about the situation, the Residents' Association, the Christchurch Estuary Association and Environment Canterbury and the work was carried out between 8.30am to 1.30pm, on Monday 8 January. Two contractors were used, one with a tractor and specialist rake, and the other with a large loader and two trucks.

In the past the sea lettuce had been taken to the compost plant and integrated into the product, but this year this was not accepted because of the change in plant operations. Instead the waste vegetation had to be dumped at the Burwood landfill. This waste also had to be buried to avoid the offensive smell upsetting neighbours. This added significantly to the cost of the operation which was approximately \$4,000.

The result was satisfactory, although some vehicle compaction effects were noted. Residents were appreciative of the clean up. Unfortunately a significant amount of sea lettuce is still out in the Estuary and could come ashore at any time in the future.

Following the clean-up operation, some feedback has been received from residents in the Ebbtide Street to Penguin Street area who are questioning why their frontage was not cleaned up as well. As noted previously it was considered that the build-up in their area was comparatively light and patchy and did not meet the conditions necessary to justify the conditions of our consent. The judgement was made that their area did not justify mechanical clearance, not because it did not smell, but because the intrusion, impact and effectiveness of machinery could not be justified for such a light build-up. Also this section of Estuary has many rubble walls, with loose rocks and concrete, which are difficult to mechanically clear at any time. I understand that there is still some residual smell in the areas cleared, while in other areas intervention cannot readily be justified unless further significant build-up occurs. It is also possible that the smell could be coming from quite some distance away from houses, making any effective reduction in the offending smell quite difficult to achieve.

A significant build-up has been noted on the western side of the Estuary, along the Humphries Drive frontage. As this is not a residential area there had been no complaints, until recently. The situation for the area in front of Humphries Drive is that a resource consent is not held to work on the Estuary. Any mechanical clean-up would have to be done under emergency provisions.

Difficult judgements are involved in deciding when enough has been done about the problem and whether the cost can be justified.

Board members will have received a copy of a letter dated 12 January 2001 from Mr Keith Wright from Southshore concerning the sea lettuce accumulating in the Avon/Heathcote Estuary in the vicinity of Heron Street. The letter noted that the sea lettuce in his particular locality had not been removed during a clean-up undertaken early in January. Mr Wright called for the Estuary to be cleaned up more generally.

Recommendation: For information.

**Chairperson's
Recommendation:** That the information be received.