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MP for West Coast-Tasman

Minister of Agriculture

Minister for Biosecurity

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MIN23-0360

Katina Conomos

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Dear Katina

Thank you for your correspondence of 15 May regarding exotic *Caulerpa*.

I acknowledge your concern regarding the threat posed by exotic *Caulerpa* (*Caulerpa brachypus* and *C. parvifolia*) to Aotearoa / New Zealand's coastal waters. Preserving the health of the Hauraki Marine Park and wider marine coastal environment is of high importance.

Early in the exotic *Caulerpa* response, Biosecurity New Zealand (BNZ) engaged a technical advisory group (TAG) comprising scientific experts on invasive marine algae including *Caulerpa* species and mātauranga Māori specialists. The TAG agreed with BNZ marine scientists that eradication was not possible due to the extent of the spread (some 44 hectares of coverage in the heaviest infested bay on Aotea Great Barrier Island and at depths of up to 38 metres), the limited control tools available to deal with marine invasive seaweeds, and the biology of *Caulerpa*.

While spread of this invasive seaweed remains a risk, the team at BNZ, with partners in the regions immediately affected by the incursion, have and continue to put in significant effort to prevent or slow the spread of *Caulerpa*.

As you note, BNZ have been using regulatory tools (Controlled Area Notice), customary tools (rāhui), public education and awareness, pathway management, the application of science and mātauranga and on-going research to slow the spread. I am advised that the plan is for these actions to continue but also that a number of important additional approaches are underway. A TAG is being established to further examine suction dredging as a control tool as this method has had some positive impact overseas. I expect the TAG to examine this option and develop advice, taking into account the different conditions of those international incursions compared with those we are currently experiencing in New Zealand.

While eradicating exotic *Caulerpa* from New Zealand waters is not currently possible, I am told localised elimination of small volumes in new locations may be feasible and suction dredging may be an additional tool for this, the feasibility of which will be dependent on the TAGs advice. The recent detection of exotic *Caulerpa* at the Bay of Islands has heightened the need to reassess available control options.

An additional group of experts is being formed to examine on-going options for the control of *Caulerpa* now that we have had two years' experience of it in Aotearoa and understand more about how it behaves in our conditions.

With regards to the requests outlined in your letter, I address these below:

The standing-up of a Hauraki Gulf Marine Park *Caulerpa* monitoring and rapid response programme.

- There has been considerable effort already to increase public awareness of the risk of exotic *Caulerpa* in the Hauraki Gulf, including a call to report sightings. My officials are working with Waikato Regional Council and Auckland Council and will discuss these matters. I will ask them to provide advice directly to you following this meeting.

Conducting an urgent trial of removal at scale at Aotea or Ahuahu.

- BNZ is convening two Technical Advisory Groups as mentioned above to assess on-going options. I expect the outcomes of these assessments to provide a basis for ongoing activities.

Expanding the current MPI research programme to assess the potential environmental, cultural and recreational impacts of the spread of *Caulerpa*.

- Current exotic *Caulerpa* research aims to address some knowledge gaps including the potential long-term impacts of exotic *Caulerpa* on ecosystems and native flora and fauna at Aotea. The Technical Advisory Group looking at on-going options will be asked to provide advice about future research requirements.

Accelerating Revitalising the Gulf: Government action on the Sea Change Plan (2021).

- I am advised Fisheries New Zealand and the Department of Conservation are working hard to implement *Revitalising the Gulf* in an integrated fashion. This includes work to develop the Hauraki Gulf Marine Protection Bill in response to the marine protection proposals and the finalisation of the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan. Fisheries New Zealand will be providing final advice on the Fisheries Plan to the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries in June.
- Fisheries New Zealand has also been prioritising and accelerating the action in the Fisheries Plan to restrict bottom trawling and Danish seining to defined areas in the Hauraki Gulf. While biosecurity objectives are not the main purpose of this action, this coincidentally has the potential to reduce the risk of exotic *Caulerpa* spread. BNZ considers the impact of fishing methods when looking at high risk activities which spread exotic *Caulerpa*, as can be seen from the fishing restrictions currently at Aotea and Ahuahu.

Continuing to improve practices to stop invasives getting here in the first place.

- New Zealand's biofouling requirements for international arrivals are held within the Craft Risk Management Standard for Biofouling (CRMS-Biofoul) that has been in force since 2018. The standard requires all international vessels to arrive in New Zealand with a 'clean hull'. The level of acceptable fouling allowed for a vessel to be considered to have a 'clean hull' is dependent on the vessel's length of stay in New Zealand and where they wish to visit. To prove compliance, vessels must submit evidence at least 48 hours prior to arrival. If documents are either missing, or showing fouling above our thresholds, a vessel will be issued a non-compliance notice. A Notice of Direction (NOD) is issued by BNZ when a vessel fails to show compliance with the CRMS-Biofoul and list the compliance actions a vessel must follow to manage the biofouling risk that they pose to New Zealand.

- BNZ is currently in the final stages of reviewing the requirements for all internationally arriving vessels to ensure they remain fit for purpose. One of the changes being proposed is the addition of minimum reporting requirements for biofouling assessment. BNZ sees a large variation in the quality of vessel biofouling inspection reports. The minimum reporting document details the areas on a vessel that need to be represented in a report and the quality of the evidence. The increase in the quality and coverage of the hull within inspection reports will create more consistent and accurate representation of the status of each vessel's hull. This consistency in reporting should enable BNZ to make clear and more accurate decisions on the risk of a vessel and would add an extra level of assurance that the biofouling risk is being accurately assessed and captured.
- In addition to the updated of the CRMS, BNZ is setting up a voluntary approval scheme for vessel biofouling inspection providers. Providers that are able to effectively demonstrate they consistently meet the minimum evidence requirements, and the requirements of the approval scheme will be able to apply to be a part of the scheme. This is another added layer of assurance and will help tighten the biosecurity for international vessels arrival.

I would note this Government's significant investment in 2022 of \$5.56 million over four years to improve marine biosecurity within New Zealand. This investment will deliver a programme focussed on a national campaign to get users of the marine environment to take actions to prevent the spread of marine invasive species and will also co-fund or seed initiatives to develop tools, best practice, and capability. This initiative will work to build on existing regional partnerships and marine biosecurity programmes, including the work of the Top of the North regional marine partnership, and prevent future impacts to economic well-being, the environment, and the relationships between tangata whenua and Māori culture, traditions, ancestral lands, waters, wāhi tapu, and taonga. This new investment is already contributing to the campaign focussed on preventing further spread of exotic *Caulerpa*.

I am advised that, at an operational level, BNZ officials are engaging with staff from the four regional councils at the top of the North Island to strengthen interagency collaboration on exotic *Caulerpa*. I expect any future activities related to management of exotic *Caulerpa* to involve a collaborative effort between BNZ, mana whenua, councils, and other stakeholders. I note that under the Biosecurity Act 1993 each regional council has a regional leadership role for pest management activities, including leadership in activities that prevent or reduce the adverse effects of harmful organisms that are present in New Zealand in its region, and by promoting coordination of pest management between regions.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the ongoing work of the Revive Our Gulf project, its collaborators and partners and the work being carried out to reinstate large scale, sub-tidal kūtai / mussel reefs across the inner Hauraki Gulf.

Yours sincerely



Hon Damien O'Connor
Minister for Biosecurity