



# Sea spurge

## A serious threat to New Zealand’s beaches

The coastal weed sea spurge, *Euphorbia paralias*, was found at a beach near Aotea Harbour in the Waikato in 2012, and a single plant was detected at Mokau on the North Island’s west coast in 2019. This invasive weed would seriously impact our coastal environments if it became established. It is likely to have arrived on ocean currents from Australia.

Sea spurge infestations have caused major environmental problems at many Australian beaches by displacing native plants and changing natural patterns of sand movement.

### What we are doing

Biosecurity New Zealand, the Department of Conservation, Waikato Regional Council and Taranaki Regional Council are working together on an eradication programme to stop sea spurge from establishing in those regions. The programme is focused on early detection so that plants are removed before they have time to produce seed. Activities include site management and annual survey of the coastline near Aotea Harbour.

### How you can help

We need to find out if sea spurge is growing at other beaches, so let Biosecurity New Zealand know if you find any of the plants by calling the pest and disease hotline – **0800 80 99 66**.

Early detection and reporting will help prevent sea spurge from establishing here.

Please don’t disturb the plants, as this could spread the seeds. Take a photo if you can and note the location as accurately as possible – GPS co-ordinates are ideal. Sea spurge has toxic sap, so be careful it doesn’t get on your skin.

### What to look out for

Sea spurge is a hardy European shrub that thrives in coastal areas. It has multiple stems that are often reddish at the base, and its spiky, tightly-packed blue/green leaves are 4–20mm long and 1–16mm wide. Green flowers bloom at the stem tips from September to May and the flower

stems die off each year. The milky sap that oozes from broken stems is toxic to people and animals. The plants grow to about one metre tall in dense clusters overseas. Plants found in New Zealand were up to about 40 cm tall.

Sea spurge could establish almost anywhere along the New Zealand coastline. It looks similar to the rare native shore spurge, *Euphorbia glauca*, and New Zealand linen flax, *Linum monogynum*. However, native shore spurge has reddish flowers and much larger leaves that are 30–80mm long, while the stems of New Zealand linen flax are not reddish at the base. The New Zealand Plant Conservation Network website has photos of all these plants.



Biosecurity New Zealand exotic pest and disease line **0800 80 99 66**  
[www.biosecurity.govt.nz](http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz)

