

SEA SPURGE

A SERIOUS NEW THREAT TO NEW ZEALAND'S BEACHES

BACKGROUND

The beach weed sea spurge, *Euphorbia paralias*, has been found at a beach near Aotea Harbour in the Waikato. It may also be at other beaches. This invasive weed would seriously impact on our coastal environments if it became established.

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

It is likely to have arrived on ocean currents from Australia.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

The Ministry for Primary Industries, Department of Conservation and Waikato Regional Council have started control measures at the beach where sea spurge was found, and are also checking other beaches near Aotea Harbour.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

We need to find out if sea spurge is growing at other beaches, so let us know if you find any of the plants by calling the exotic pest line – 0800 80 99 66.

Please do not disturb the plants, as this could spread the seeds. Take a photo and note the location as accurately as possible – GPS coordinates are ideal. If you don't have a camera with you, take a sample of the plant without disturbing the seeds, and store in a sealed plastic bag in the fridge. Sea spurge has toxic sap, so be careful it doesn't get on your skin. The exotic pest line will tell you what to do with the plant sample.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Sea spurge is a hardy European shrub that thrives in sand dunes. 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 1m tall in dense clusters.



Sea spurge is most likely to grow on sand dunes or around beach debris. Sea currents are likely to carry the seeds from Australia to northern beaches on the North and South Islands, as well as Southland and Stewart Island.

Sea spurge looks similar to the rare native shore spurge, *Euphorbia glauca*, and New Zealand linen flax, *Linum monogynum*. However, native shore spurge has much larger leaves that are 30-80mm long, while the stems of New Zealand linen flax are not reddish at the base and do not ooze milky sap when broken. The New Zealand Plant Conservation Network website has photos of all these plants.