AN UNDERWATER invader could threaten native sea life in The Solent, marine experts have warned.
Colonies of the carpet sea squirt have been discovered in Cowes, Lymington and Gosport, according to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).
But Capt Stuart McIntosh, Cowes harbourmaster, told the County Press: "I have spoken to Sue Hawley, our estuaries officer. We are not aware of any reports of sea squirt in the Medina."
The creature, which probably arrived by attaching itself to the hulls of yachts, spreads rapidly by squirting tiny, tadpole-like larvae.
It grows over mussel, clam and oyster beds and has also been known to clog up fish-farming equipment.
Originally from Japan, the carpet sea squirt has caused major economic and environmental problems in North America, New Zealand, Ireland and on the continent.
It was also discovered in North Wales in summer 2008.
Chris McMullon, Natural England’s senior coastal specialist in the south east, said: "We are working with local marine experts on the best ways of tackling carpet sea squirt in the crowded waters of The Solent, drawing on the Welsh experiences.
*Preventing new invasive non-native species from establishing in England is a high priority, and we hope we can get control measures in place very soon.
*Tackling this problem is an urgent priority for marine teams if valuable habitats are going to be protected, but we know this will not be easy.
*Vigilance on the part of boat owners is critical if efforts are going to be effective."
The latest colonies were found by The Marine Biological Association and Bangor University during a survey commissioned by Defra.
It said a plan to eradicate the creature was being drawn up.
• Any sighting can be reported to the non-native species hotline on 0845 600 3078.

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