

## **Invasive carpet seasquirt spreads rapidly on the Herne Bay coast**

by Joe Walker, Kentonline, the KM Group      December 5, 2011

An invasive sea creature known as “marine vomit” is threatening to engulf the Herne Bay coast.

Carpet seasquirt – which spreads rapidly and aggressively - has been discovered growing on boulders and reefs in waters surrounding the town.

It is the first time the unsightly species has been seen in the UK outside of harbours and marinas.

The seasquirt – believed to be native to Japan – reproduces rapidly and can threaten other marine life, including oysters and mussels.

The news has sparked fears the spongy creature will cover huge parts of the Herne Bay coastline, with the Environment Agency saying there’s no way of stopping it.

Environmental officer Ian Humpheryes said: “It spreads so rapidly and aggressively. We can’t even look for its natural predators because we don’t know what its home environment is.

“It should be living offshore, so the fact it’s made its way to our beaches doesn’t bode well.

“Within two weeks it can spread from something the size of a fingernail to a foot across.

“We’ve had invasive species before, but they don’t grow as fast as this stuff. The sad thing is we have no idea what we can do about it.”

The species – which spreads on dirty boat hulls, fishing equipment and even floating seaweed – can destroy shellfish like oysters and mussels.

But marine biologist Dr John Hayes, of Reculver-based Seasalter Shellfish, says the company is playing a waiting game.

He said: “It’s certainly cause for concern, but we’ll need to wait and see what happens.

“If it proves to have no enemies then it’s going to be a big problem, but hopefully something might come along and eat it all up. All these sea squirts are a pain in the backside.”

For full story see this week's Herne Bay Gazette.

