

Work starts to kill off sea squirts in Holyhead

Owen R. Hughes, DPW West February 14, 2012



Sea squirt which is being targeted around Anglesey

Photo credit: U.S. Geological Survey

THE extermination of an invasive sea creature has started at a marina over fears they could spread to lucrative mussel beds in the Menai Strait.

Colonies of dangerous Japanese sea squirts pose a threat to mussel and scallop beds by smothering the seabed, and have been carried into Holyhead marina by boats from Ireland.

Now the Countryside Council for Wales has started a £250,000 project to remove them.

The work involves fixing massive bags around the underwater structures of the marina – including the floating pontoons, mooring chains and buoys.

By stopping clean flows of water from reaching the sea squirts, they will suffocate and die.

Rohan Holt, CCW marine biologist managing the project, said: “If we successfully eradicate the sea squirt, we will work hard to make sure that it does not recolonise. This will mean careful monitoring in Holyhead marina and other marinas and popular mooring areas throughout Wales to check that it hasn’t reappeared.

“Guidelines for small boat owners on how they can help will be an important part of this, as well as regular checks.”

Money will also be used to build a quarantine berth in Holyhead harbour so vessels coming from affected areas can be isolated and treated.

The cash is part of £1m from the Welsh Government’s Ecosystem Resilience, Diversity and Compliance Fund.

Mussel fisherman James Wilson said: “The consequences of the sea squirt reaching the Strait would be disastrous. This would not just be for the mussel industry but other natural habitats like the mud flats. The sea squirts attach to any hard surface and smother that area.”

A CCW spokesman said: “The carpet sea squirt has had devastating impact on marine life in other parts of the world where it has been accidentally introduced, such as New Zealand.

“There, it has literally carpeted acres of sea bed, making these areas unsuitable for native marine plants and animals.”

The owners of Holyhead Marina are supporting CCW’s efforts. The target is to completely rid the harbour of sea squirt by spring 2012 before it can spread more rapidly in the summer

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