

Pest of the month – Spartina (Cord Grass)



Spartina (Cord Grass).

Spartina is an aquatic perennial grass found in estuaries and coastal margins. It is a stiff grass with fleshy rhizomes that form dense mats in intertidal areas, and grows up to one metre in height.

Spartina was introduced into New Zealand in the early 1900s and planted to reclaim mudflats before the ecological importance of estuarine systems was understood.

The Spartina plantings trapped large amounts of sediment, destroying the intertidal habitat favoured by flatfish and birds. The plantings also altered the hydro-dynamics of important fish spawning and marine nursery areas. This resulted in estuaries and shallow harbours becoming thin drains surrounded by rank grasslands, causing

a significant loss of biodiversity and impeding drainage in flood events.

Most of Spartina's spread is from rhizome fragments. These can survive considerable periods of time in saltwater, aiding long-distance dispersal. These fragments readily resprout when they settle in muddy or silty sites. This makes it difficult to locate new sites during the early stages of establishment.

In the past, Spartina could be found throughout the Waimea Estuary, with extensive areas of infestation from the Tahunanui back beach to Ngaio Bay near Kaiteriteri. In Golden Bay, there were limited infestations near Pупonga and Westhaven Inlet. From an estimated coverage of 100ha, these have now been reduced to a number of local infestations.

Eradication is believed to be possible and Spartina has been included in the Tasman Regional Pest Management Strategy as a Total Control plant. Tasman District Council staff and the Department of Conservation are working closely together to achieve this.

If you are aware of the presence of Spartina, please contact DOC or a Biosecurity Officer at the Council (phone 543 8400).

For information on controlling pest plants, readers can visit the following websites:

http://www.arc.govt.nz/environment/plants-and-animals/search-for-plants/regional-plants_home.cfm
www.weedbusters.org.nz