TE OHU KAIMOANA

MĀORI FISHERIES TRUST

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Clean and dry will save paua

Te Ohu Kaimoana (the Maori Fisheries Trust) and Aotearoa Fisheries Limited are supporting industry calls for Biosecurity New Zealand to implement increased border controls and an education campaign to help stop the devastating Australian Abalone Virus Ganglioneuritis (AVG) from getting to New Zealand.

The two leading Maori fisheries organisations request that Biosecurity NZ tightens border controls to prevent contamination in New Zealand and undertake an education campaign alerting all Kiwis to the threat of AVG before holidaymakers head to Australia for their summer Christmas break.

"Paua has cultural, economic and social values for all New Zealanders. It is a hugely significant fishery for Maori contributing million of dollars a year to our commercial enterprises as well as individual iwi organisations. Paua is a wonderful recreational fishery as well so it is extremely important for everyone coming into this country take simple steps to protect this valuable resource," Te Ohu Kaimoana chief executive Peter Douglas said.

"Clean and dry fishing, surfing, diving gear will help stop this Australian virus from entering our pristine coastal waters and is a call every Kiwi must heed. Anyone who has been in waters along the coast of Victoria, Australia, must clean their gear and dry their gear so they can save our paua from the same devastating impact the virus is having on the Australian abalone industry."

The AVG virus was first discovered in December 2005 and since then has travelled 200km along the Victorian coastline. It kills abalone quickly and is responsible for declines in abalone abundance of between 40 and 95 percent. Some abalone fisheries in Australia have been completely decimated. Scientific information is scant and the origin of the virus is unknown at this stage. Scientists in New Zealand, Australia and France are working to understand the virus and how it is transmitted.

The chief executive of Aotearoa Fisheries Limited (AFL), Jeremy Fleming, said paua was critical to the economic performance of many Maori fishing enterprises. "AFL has significant investments in paua on behalf of iwi and Maori. Iwi organisations also collectively own 10 percent of the paua in the quota management system, so the economic and cultural value of paua to all Maori is huge."

"The effect of this virus on New Zealand commercial paua enterprises cannot be underestimated. The industry in some parts of Victoria and South Australia has been decimated and in Tasmania, where the virus has not been detected, the market has been downgraded. Kiwis must be vigilant to ensure we protect what we have and ensure that all marine gear is cleaned and dried before coming home."

TE OHU KAI MOANA TRUSTEE LIMITED
Trustee for the Maori Fisheries Trust
Protecting Maori fisheries assets for future generations

Level 1 | Hitachi House
48 Mulgrave treet
PO Box 3277
Wellington | New Zealand

Phone: 64 4 931 9500
Fax: 64 4 931 9518
Email: tari@teohu.maori.nz
Web: www.teohu.maori.nz

"We must do all we can to stop this virus from reaching New Zealand waters," Mr Fleming said.

Abalone Virus Ganglioneuritis (AVG)

- AVG is a herpes-like virus that was detected in a subpopulation of wild abalone in Taylor's Bay, Victoria, Australia in May 2006. Since then, the spread of the virus has been closely monitored and is showing consistent movement along the coast of Victoria of 5-10kms a month.

- In less than two years since it was discovered, it has moved almost 200km along the coastline of Victoria and recently been observed infecting black lip and green lip abalone populations.

- Stock abundance surveys conducted since the outbreak of the virus have suggested declines in the abundance of infected populations of between 40 and 95 percent.

- The virus causes inflammation of the nervous tissue resulting in the edges of the foot curling inwards, swelling and protrusion of the mouth and excess mucus production. Active signs of infection include a loss of muscle control, sliding or falling off their home scars on the reef, large amounts of intact moribund abalone, empty shells and loose meats rolling around in the wash.

- The virus is spread through direct contact between infected and healthy abalone. It is not known if or how the virus is excreted from an infected animal.

- The virus can spread without a host through the water column, however, it is not known how long it survives in this medium nor is it known if the virus is transmitted from parent to progeny.

- The spread of the virus along the Victoria coastline raises the risk of this virus infecting New Zealand's abalone population. The green lip, black lip and hybrid species of abalone in Australia appear to show equal susceptibility to the virus. The Ministry of Fisheries says there is no reason to suspect that New Zealand species are not susceptible to infection.

- New Zealand's best defence is to prevent any incursion into this country through increased border protection and an education campaign.

- Water sports equipment that has been used in the area of infection along the Victoria coastline and would include surfboards, wetsuits, diving and snorkelling gear, fishing gear, among others, must be cleaned and dried before leaving the infected area or before it gets to New Zealand;

- Footwear and clothing that has been worn on a land-based aquaculture facilities in Victoria or South Australia must be cleaned and dried before leaving the infected area or before getting to New Zealand;

- Any live or dead abalone from the infected area must not enter New Zealand;

- Any shells, stones or other beach material that has been collected from along the Victoria coastline must also be confiscated.