TOP OF THE SOUTH
Marine Biosecurity Partnership

Top of the South Marine Biosecurity Partnership

Incident Response Manual

October 2025

Nelson City Council | Te Kaunihera o Whakatū
tasman district council | Te Kaunihera o te tai o Aorere
MARLBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL
Greater Wellington Te Pane Matua Taiao
Biosecurity New Zealand
Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua

Contents

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this manual is to provide an agreed process for the Top of the South Marine Biosecurity Partnership ('the Partnership') for responding to marine biosecurity incidents, including marine risk organism incursions and suspect risk vectors. This manual provides guidance to ensure that decisions and processes are approached in a consistent and agreed-upon manner by all councils and stakeholders with regional responsibilities under the Partnership.

All members of the Partnership are encouraged to follow the guidance set out in this manual when responding to a marine biosecurity incident. However, the lead agency may adapt the processes and guidance in the manual to suit the scale and type of the incident and their own internal processes and systems. It includes decision-making guides and templates for documentation, which can be found in the supporting appendices.

2.0 Incident response systems

The incident response system documented in this plan is split into the two most likely incidents:

- Report of a high-risk vessel
- Report of a high-risk organism in a place e.g. wharf piles.

Definitions

A high-risk vessel is defined as a vessel with either a known or unknown non-indigenous species (NIS) and/or conspicuous fouling (3 - 5 on the level of fouling (LOF) on the Cawthron Level of Fouling scale that has recently entered the region. This could include a vessel from a known high-risk area in NZ or overseas.

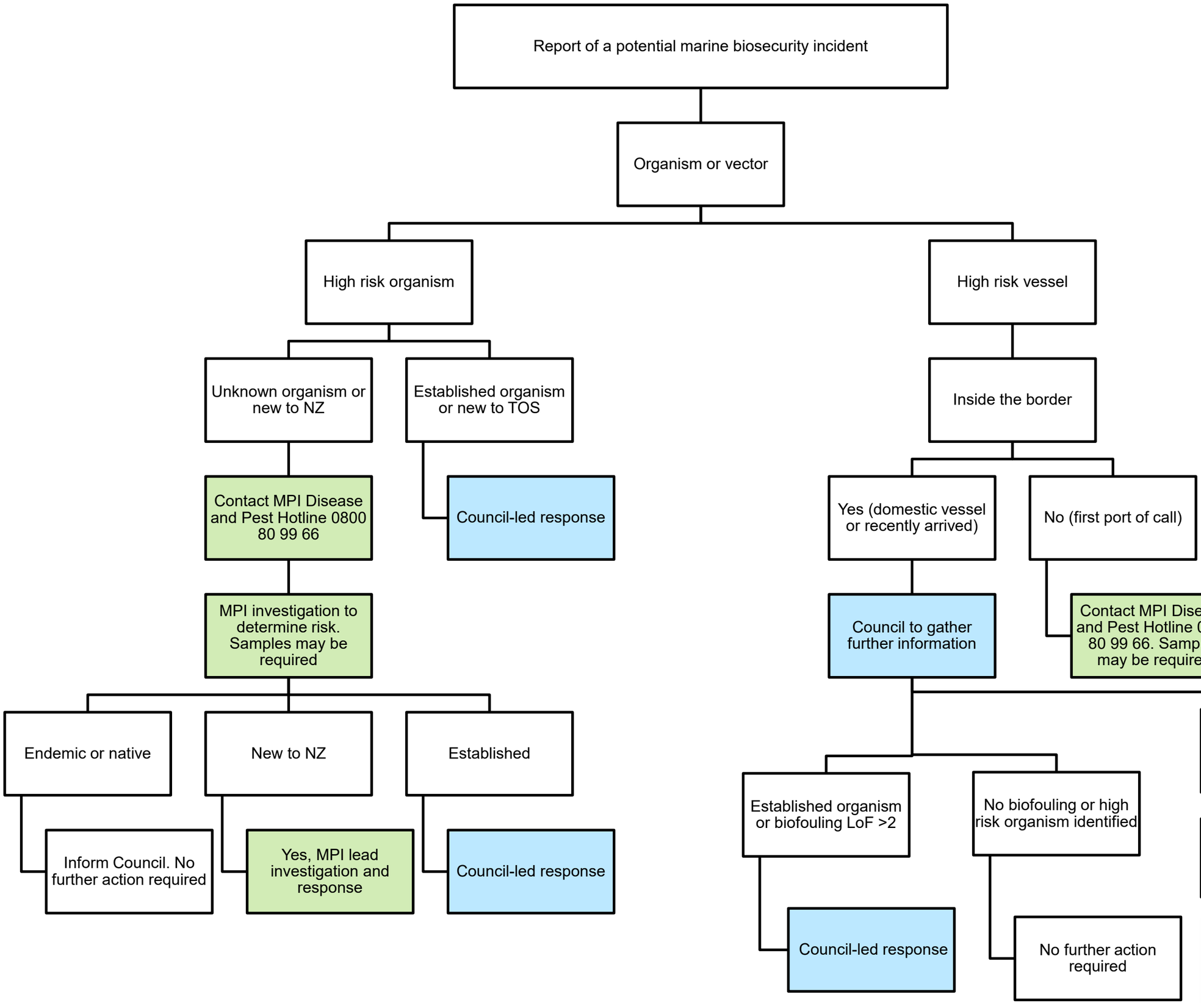
A high-risk organism is a non-indigenous species (NIS) that is potentially harmful and is new to New Zealand and/or new to the Nelson, Tasman, Marlborough or Wellington regions. It may be an unknown organism (i.e. the person reporting it is unable to confirm the species). A high-risk organism could also be an organism that is established in the TOS and is considered high-risk due to its potential impact. Formal identification by Marine Invasives Taxonomic Service (MITS) may be required to identity the species.

A list of high-risk organisms and their suggested response is provided in Appendix 1.

There are four main phases of a marine biosecurity incident response:

1. Report of a potential high-risk vessel or high-risk organism
2. Assigning responsibility
3. Initial investigation and immediate measures
4. Responding to the incident

Figure 1: Process for responding to a report of a potential marine biosecurity incident


Report of a potential marine biosecurity incident
Organism or vector
High risk organism
High risk vessel
Unknown organism or new to NZ
Established organism or new to TOS
Inside the border
Contact MPI Disease and Pest Hotline 0800 80 99 66
Council-led response
Yes (domestic vessel or recently arrived)
No (first port of call)
MPI investigation to determine risk. Samples may be required
Council to gather further information
Contact MPI Disease and Pest Hotline 0800 80 99 66. Samples may be required
Endemic or native
New to NZ
Established
Established organism or biofouling LoF >2
No biofouling or high risk organism identified
Unknown organism or new to NZ
Inform Council. No further action required
Yes, MPI lead investigation and response
Council-led response
Council-led response
No further action required
Contact MPI Disease and Pest Hotline 0800 80 99 66
MPI lead investigation and response

3.0 Incident response phases

3.1 Report of marine biosecurity incident

A notification of a marine biosecurity incident is received by MPI, regional council or the coordination team. This will typically be a notification of a possible high-risk organism or a high-risk vessel.

If there is a report of a high-risk organism or a high-risk vessel that has entered New Zealand waters for the first time, call the MPI Pest and Disease hotline **0800 80 99 66** or use the online reporting form: Exotic Pest and Disease Online Notification.

3.2 Assigning responsibility

Once the nature of a marine biosecurity incident has been identified, the next step is to determine which agency will lead the response. The following guidelines can help establish lead responsibility:

- Default lead: If there is uncertainty about who should lead, the regional council will assume responsibility until further information clarifies the most appropriate lead agency.
- Collaborative response: the lead agency may coordinate with other agencies and/or industry partners to deliver a joint response.

3.2.1 General guidelines

- International vessels: responsibility lies with MPI.
- Domestic vessels: responsibility lies with the regional council.
- High-risk organisms:
    - If unknown, or new to New Zealand, MPI is generally responsible.
    - If already established in New Zealand, the regional council is responsible, unless MPI has initiated a national programme of action for that organism (e.g. *Caulerpa*).

3.3 Investigation and immediate measures

There is usually a need to gather initial intelligence to assess the nature of the risk and determine whether any immediate measures are required. The risk assessment will generally be undertaken by the lead agency where the incident is located. If deemed a council responsibility, MPI can still be approached for assistance.

3.3.1 MPI investigations and response

An Incursion Investigator from MPI will lead the initial investigation. They may request more information, and will advise on sample collection, handling and transport protocols.

The investigator will complete a Rapid Assessment Report (RAR) to help determine whether MPI will initiate a response. They may also establish that the organism is:

- Endemic or native to New Zealand, or
- Responsibility of the regional council

Quarantine Officers also have powers for First Port of Call vessels.

If MPI leads the response, it will follow the Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS), 3rd edition. This scalable framework is used across all sectors and applies to both new incursions and established pests.

When MPI leads a response, the Partnership role is to support and assist as required.

The Partnership may need to meet to:

- Discuss proposed actions, and
- Decide what resources and staff are available to assist.

3.3.2 Regional council investigations

Regional council investigations will be led by a regional council representative. Samples may be taken, but MPI must be notified and agree if they are intended to be sent to MITS for identification. Immediate measures by a council may involve securing a site or containing a vessel to prevent any immediate risk from potentially harmful organisms. In all cases, such measures will require the voluntary cooperation of the parties. If this is not possible, the use of powers under Section 6 of the Biosecurity Act 1993 will need to be considered, depending on the status of the organism and the powers of the regional council.

3.3.2.1 High-risk vessel

Where a vessel is suspected of containing a biofouling risk, this must be documented and investigated. Details about the vessel and history need to be obtained by the investigator. Travel history and past inspection details may be available in the Marine Vessel Portal.

3.3.2.2 High-risk organism

Confirmation of a high-risk organism typically involves the appropriate identification of the organism. The subsequent response will depend on whether the organism is already established in New Zealand and/or new to the region. Samples may need to be taken, but MPI must be notified and agree if they are intended to be sent to MITS for identification.

3.4 Responding to an incident

Once the investigation has collected sufficient information, a decision needs to be made about whether to progress to a response or not and what size response is appropriate. MPI have their own response procedures; this section relates to a **council-led response only.** There may be instances where joint agency responses are required, and this section can serve as a guide. There may also be instances where another agency, such as the aquaculture industry, iwi, or community, chooses to respond.

3.4.1 Tools and templates

Marine Vessel Portal

The Marine Vessel Portal (MVP) is a vital biosecurity tool that enables regional councils to track vessel movements and record inspections of vessel hulls and structures. Key features include:

- Mobile apps for field staff to inspect boats

- Desktop tools for data analysis and reporting
- National database of vessels throughout New Zealand
- Supports agencies and marina operators to view vessel movements
- Specialised tools for biosecurity response, such as Caulerpa infestation
- Integrates AIS tracking

The MVP is used to capture and record data from marine biosecurity incidents. Information collected includes:

- Vessel name
- Vessel description
- Vessel length
- Location
- Level of Fouling and pest species present

TOS Marine Biosecurity Incident Response Form

For all marine biosecurity incidents, the regional council representative must complete a TOS Marine Biosecurity Incident Response Form (Appendix 2) or similar to ensure all relevant details of the incident are recorded.

Incident Response Prioritisation Tool

The Incident Response Prioritisation Tool (based on MPI's response system) in Appendix 3 will assist the responding regional council in deciding on response and management options.

Response Action Plan

The Response Action Plan (Appendix 4) provides a general overview of actions, and each agency can develop detailed plans for each of the identified tasks. It is designed to be updated on whatever timeframe is required; i.e. initially it may be daily and after a period of time it might be monthly or longer, depending on the response.

Many additional things will have to be considered during an incident such as predicted costs (medium and long term), funding availability (medium and long term), likelihood of success in removing or controlling the organism, and availability of resources. The response prioritisation tool can also assist.

3.4.2 High-risk vessel response

For high-risk vessels, request that the vessel owner voluntarily comply with actions to mitigate biosecurity risks. Council biosecurity officers, who are warranted under the Biosecurity Act, will be able to determine a response to breaches of the rules outlined in their Regional Pest Management Plan. Local marina or port rules may permit certain actions to be taken. Harbourmaster powers may also be used where the vessel is so fouled that it is a navigational hazard.

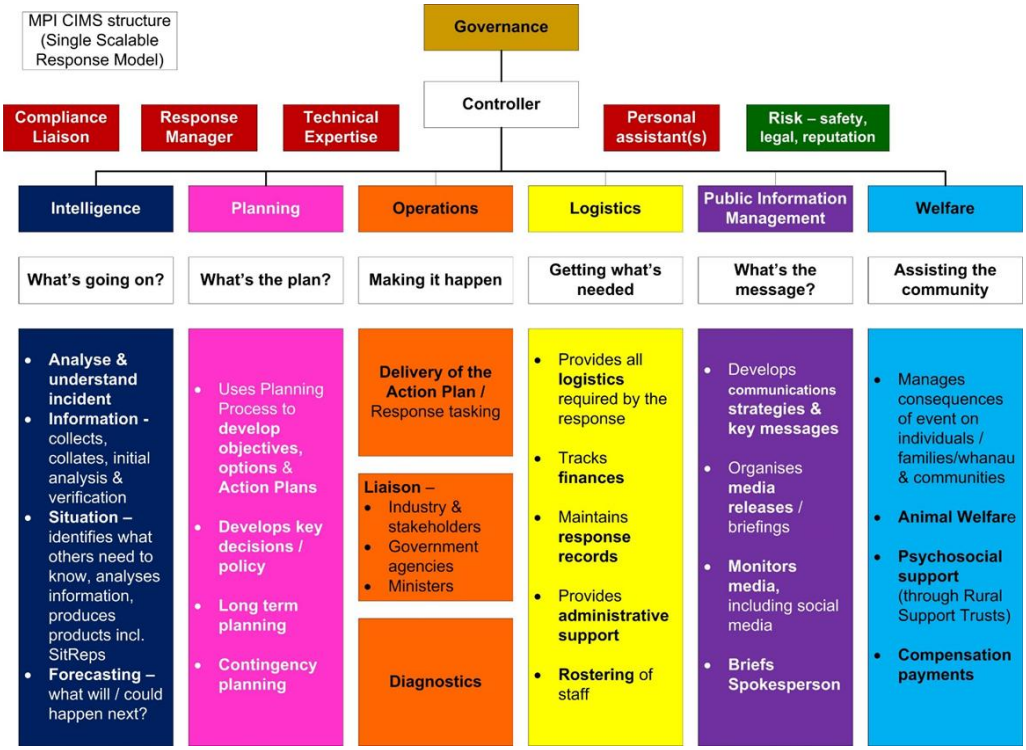
3.4.3 High-risk organism response

For high-risk organisms, regional councils will follow their organisational processes where these exist, or the guidance in this manual where they do not. Council biosecurity officers, warranted under the Biosecurity Act, will be able to determine a response to breaches of rules relating to high-risk organisms outlined in their Regional Pest Management Plan. If the organism is an Unwanted Organism, councils can develop a small-scale management plan under the Biosecurity Act if not listed in an RPMP.

3.4.4 Response scale

Many incidents may not warrant a response or may only need a small-scale response. Where other stakeholders want a greater response than is decided by the council, they may choose to mount their own response. Small-scale responses can be completed without invoking a CIMS response, although elements may be involved as appropriate.

Any large-scale response should be managed under CIMS, which is used by government agencies in New Zealand (see the figure below).



4.0 Resources

A range of resources can be made available to support a TOS incident response, depending on the scale and nature of the event. These may include personnel, equipment, communication tools, transport, and technical expertise. Access to these resources will be coordinated through the lead agency and supported by contributing partners.

4.1 Contact details

If a response is required, use the following contact numbers:

Contact	Phone number
MPI Exotic Pest and Disease Hotline	0800 80 99 66
Tasman District Council	03 543 8460
Marlborough District Council	03 520 7400
Nelson City Council	03 546 0423
Greater Wellington Regional Council	0800 496 734

The Master Stakeholder Contact List contains the most up-to-date contact details for the Partnership and its wider stakeholders. Use the tab “TOS Incident Manual” for contact details for incident responses.

MASTER_Stakeholder_Contact_List_2025.xlsx.

4.2 Incident log

All incidents are to be recorded in the Partnership’s Incident Register.

4.3 Haul out facilities

A list of haul-out locations and services can be found here: Haul Out Facilities.

Appendix 1 – High Risk Organisms

Table 1 List of high-risk marine non-indigenous species, characteristics and management action required for Top of the South (TOS) and Wellington Regions. Green shading denotes no action required, orange requires either the council and/or MPI to be contacted, and red requires both the council and MPI to be notified.

High-risk marine non-indigenous species	Status / Action Required
	**Wakame/Undaria (*Undaria pinnatifida*)** Status: Unwanted Organism. Widespread in the TOS and Wellington. Due to Section 52 and 53 of the Biosecurity Act 1993, vessels must not transport *undaria*. If found in TOS or Wellington: → No response required.
	**Light-bulb ascidian (*Clavelina lepadiformis)*** Widespread in the TOS and Wellington. If found in TOS or Wellington: → No response required.
	**Carpet sea squirt *(Didemnum vexillum)*** In the TOS. If found in TOS: → No response required.
	**Clubbed tunicate (*Styela clava*)** Status: Under Management in TOS – Unwanted Organism In the TOS. Found in Porirua Harbour, not established in Wellington Harbour. If found in TOS: → No response required. If found in Wellington outside of Porirua:

	→ Contact GWRC.
	**Asian date mussel *(Arcuatula senhousia)*** In the TOS (Nelson only), very restricted distribution. Not in the Wellington region. If found in TOS: → Contact the relevant council. If found in Wellington: → Call MPI → Contact the relevant council.
	**Mediterranean fanworm (*Sabella spallanzanii*)*** Status: Unwanted Organism / Notifiable Organism. In TOS under eradication. Not established in the Wellington Region. If found in TOS or Wellington: → Call the relevant council. → Call MPI for TDC, NCC and GWRC; however, MDC will notify MPI themselves.
	**Exotic Caulerpa[1] (*Caulerpa brachypus, Caulerpa parvifolia)* and Aquarium Caulerpa *(Caulerpa taxifolia*)*** Status: All these *Caulerpa* species are Unwanted Organisms. Not in TOS or Wellington If found: → Call MPI. → Call relevant council.
	**Asian paddle crab (*Charybdis japonica*)*** Not in TOS or Wellington. If found in TOS or Wellington: → Call MPI. → Call relevant council.

[1] See link for identification of exotic Caulerpa: https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/52861-Caulerpa-parvifolia-and-Caulerpa-brachypus-fact-sheet-2022

	**Speckled ascidian *(Clavelina oblonga)*** Not in TOS or Wellington. If found: → Call MPI. → Call relevant council.
	**Australian droplet tunicate (*Eudistoma elongatum*)** Not in TOS or Wellington. If found in TOS or Wellington: → Call MPI. → Call relevant council.
	**Pyura (*Pyura doppelgangera and Pyura praepetualis*)** Not in TOS or Wellington. If found in TOS or Wellington: → Call MPI. → Call relevant council.
	**Japanese Mantis Shrimp (*Oratosquilla oratoria*)** Not in TOS or Wellington. If found in TOS or Wellington: → Call MPI. → Call relevant council.
	**Australian tube worm (*Ficopomatus Enigmaticus*)** Not in TOS or Wellington. If found in TOS or Wellington: → Call MPI. → Call relevant council.

	**Asian clam (*Potamocorbula amurensis*)*** Status: Unwanted Organism / Notifiable Organism. Not detected in NZ. If found: → Contact MPI immediately. → Call relevant council.
	**Chinese mitten crab (*Eriocheir sinensi)**** Status: Unwanted Organism / Notifiable Organism. Not detected in NZ. If found: → Contact MPI immediately. → Call relevant council.
	**European shore crab (*Carcinus maenas*)*** Status: Unwanted Organism / Notifiable Organism. Not detected in NZ. If found: → Contact MPI immediately. → Call relevant council.
	**Northern Pacific seastar (*Asterias amurensis*)*** Status: Unwanted Organism / Notifiable Organism. Not detected in NZ. If found: → Contact MPI immediately. → Call relevant council.

*Notifiable organism (NO) under Biosecurity (Notifiable Organisms) Order 2016

Appendix 2 – TOS Marine Biosecurity Incident Response Form

Date of report				
Date and time of investigation	Date		Time	
Location				
Authorised person/s				
Inspection diver/s				
Witnesses				
Person in charge present on vessel	☐ Yes ☐ No			
Skipper's name				
Skipper's contact details	Phone: Email: Address:			
Vessel owner's name (if different from above)				
Vessel owner's contact details (if different from above)	Phone: Email: Address:			
Vessel name				
Vessel ID		Homeport		
Vessel type	☐ Recreational yacht	☐ Superyacht	☐ Fishing craft	
	☐ Recreational powerboat	☐ Charter craft	☐ Other:	
Vessel operations	☐ Commercial ☐ Private			
Number of people on-board				
Date of arrival in location				
Intended date of departure from location				
Purpose of trip				
Level of fouling	☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5			
Incident Report Details				
How long has the craft been in the TOS?				

Where in TOS has this craft been on this visit?			
Where did the vessel come from?			
What activities have they been doing?			
Last port visited		Date	
What ports has the craft visited in the last year?			
Last hull inspection date		Hull last cleaned date	
Most recent anti-foul date			
Next port to visit		Expected arrival date	
Where has the craft anchored and for how long?			
Photos taken	☐ Yes ☐ No		
Unwanted Organisms Details			
Species found			
Number found (estimate/actual)			
Samples taken	☐ Yes ☐ No		
Preservation type	☐ Formalin ☐ Alcohol		
Sample ID(s)			
Sample to be sent for identification	☐ Yes ☐ No		
Sample taken by (Authorised Person)			
Notes / follow up			
Signed		Date	
Print Name			

Appendix 3 – Incident Response Prioritisation Tool

Regional Coordinator:	
Date:	
Risk organism:	

Key:	
	Most likely fit
	Less likely
	Not applicable

IMPORTANCE OF RISK ORGANISM				
	Priority 1: High importance	**Priority 2: Medium importance**	**Priority 3: Low importance**	**Comments: Key factors influencing importance/ priority rating**
Economic Impact	Likely to have significant impacts for trade (or stops trade) or production in industries with medium-large contribution to TOS economy.	Likely to have small impacts for trade or production in industries with relatively large contribution to TOS economy or large impacts to trade or production in industries with relatively small contribution to TOS economy.	Likely to have small or no impacts for trade or production in industries with relatively small contribution to TOS economy.	
Environmental Impact	Likely to have impacts for iconic species or locations or severe ecological disturbance affecting biodiversity or conservation values.	Possible but unknown impacts for iconic species or locations, or likelihood of small-scale ecological disturbance.	Not likely to impact iconic species or locations, ecological disturbance unlikely.	
Health Impact	Likely to kill or negatively impact human health on a significant scale	Likely to moderately impact human health on a moderate scale.	Small or no human health impacts likely.	

Socio-cultural Impact	Likely to have significant impacts on Maori, TOS identity or way of life, animal welfare, or culturally important amenity values.	Likely to have medium impacts on Maori, TOS identity or way of life, animal welfare, or culturally important amenity values.	Small or no significant socio-cultural impacts likely.	
COMPLEXITY OF RESPONSE				
	Lower complexity	**Medium complexity**	**Higher complexity**	**Comments: Key factors influencing complexity rating**
What is the current distribution of the organism in TOS?	Distribution is known and limited	Distribution is unknown but probably limited	Distribution is widespread, or unknown but probably widespread throughout TOS	
What is the ability of the organism to spread and establish?	Low invasive potential	Unknown	High or significant based on overseas experience or TOS-specific analysis	
To what degree do the methods exist for detection?	Surveillance systems can achieve high sensitivity and specificity	Surveillance systems can achieve satisfactory sensitivity and specificity	Sensitivity or specificity of surveillance systems likely to be problematic	
To what degree will vector controls slow the spread or contain the organism?	Controls are likely to contain or significantly slow spread	Control systems can probably contain or slow spread, but we don't know how much	Control systems unlikely to contain or slow spread	
Do the methods exist to control the organism?	Effective methods exist for eliminating organism populations	Effective methods exist for control/contain populations and may achieve local elimination	Effective methods for control or elimination do not exist or control/elimination would be difficult to achieve	

What level/skill of human resource is required?/ Are they accessible?	Taking action would require easily accessible technical/operational skills/expertise	Required technical/ operational skills/expertise is generally available, but some critical resource may be difficult or take time to access. This could affect or delay taking action	Getting access to critical technical/operational skills/experience to support taking action will present a major challenge	
Are the tools/equipment required for taking action available/accessible?	Tools and equipment required for taking action are ready to go, or should be easy to access	We should be able to access the tools and equipment required for taking action, but it may take some time	Getting access to the tools and equipment required for taking action is likely to present a major challenge and this may affect or delay a response	
BARRIERS TO SUCCESS / OPPORTUNITIES TO EFFECTIVELY MANAGING THE RISKS POSED BY THE ORGANISM				
	Low	**Medium**	**Significant**	**Comments: Key factors influencing barriers / opportunities rating**
What is the existing regulatory status?	New Organisms, Prohibited Organisms, Notifiable Organisms, Genetically Modified Organisms, Illegal imports with high prosecution potential, unauthorised goods	Unwanted organisms, regulated pests (RPMP), risk goods	Non-regulated pests	
Stakeholder concern / support	Stakeholders/specific interest groups are unlikely to oppose attempts at control. Stakeholders are likely to support taking action or may be willing to contribute	There may be some concern about attempts at control. The stakeholder community is likely to be divided, but some specific interest groups may	Stakeholders/specific interest groups are likely to strongly oppose attempts at control	

		have high expectations about taking action		
Public concern / support	Attempts at control are unlikely to cause wider public concern. The public are likely to support taking action	There is likely to be some public concern about attempts at control	There is likely to be high public concern around attempts at control	
Are there any legislative barriers to taking action? eg. RMA, HSNO	There are no legislative barriers	There are legislative barriers but these can be resolved	Legislative barriers will affect the outcome or delay the response	
Is the organism associated with a controllable pathway?	The organism is clearly associated with an identifiable pathway and there are likely to be actions we can take to mitigate the risk of future events	The organism-pathway association is likely to be random (eg. hitchhiker), but mitigation measures are likely to exist that could reduce the risk of future events	The likely pathway of entry cannot be easily identified and/or it would be difficult to take action to mitigate the risk of future events (eg. organisms blown in on the wind)	
Decision On Priority:		(Consider overall importance and complexity and barriers/opportunities)		
Key Factors Influencing Decision:				
Challenges:				
Opportunities / Barriers To Success:				

Appendix 4 – Response Action Plan

This Response Action Plan template is designed to support structured and coordinated action during a marine biosecurity incident. It outlines key response tasks, objectives, and strategies across relevant workstreams, enabling responders to track progress, assign responsibilities, and manage risks effectively.

Each action plan should be tailored to the specific incident and updated as new information becomes available.

Response:		**Workstream/s:**		**Action Plan #:**	
Time & Date	This action plan comes into effect as of dd/mm/yy and will remain in place until dd/mm/yy.				
Response Tasks	1. Task one… 2. Task two… 3. Task three… 4. Task four… 5. Task five…				

Objectives/ Activity	**Strategies**	**Tasks**	**Comments/Risks/Issues**	**Lead**	**Timeframe**
Mitigate risk posed by fouled vessel	Surveillance	Identify all high risk vessels in harbour (includes vessels moving to/from mussel farms – refer to mussel farms).	Some high risk vessels may have been absent from the harbour during recent inspection, or new high risk vessels arrived afterwards. Risk that Sabella on these vessels spawned while in the harbour – refer to harbour surveillance.		
	Tracing	Trace back & trace forward high risk	Some high risk vessels may have moved to other locations within the harbour & wider region.		

		vessels (also refer to mussel farms).			
	Organism management	Clear all Sabella from high risk vessels – urgent measures.	Mitigate immediate risk posed by Sabella. Risk that not all Sabella recovered.		
		Defoul high risk vessels or remove from region.	Ensure defouling is undertaken with minimal risk of spread of marine pests (e.g. Styela clava, Undaria as well as Sabella). Vessel owners should be encouraged to apply antifouling after defouling the hull. Without antifouling, there is a high risk of new UO's settling on the hull.		
		Provide infrastructure for vessel hull defouling & antifouling.	Provide fabdock/s & local slip facilities for range of vessel sizes.		
Mitigate risk posed by potentially infested wharf / surrounding area	Surveillance	Identify all high-risk moorings in the region.	Part of a continuous mooring inspection programme. Should begin immediately with high risk moorings – those in Harbour – to assess presence.		
	Tracing				
	Organism management	Defoul all moorings which have more than light biofouling.	Even light biofouling may harbour juvenile Sabella, so should be treated to mitigate risk. Resource consent to use Chlorine (dichlor) to spray mooring, chain & block?		

Mitigate risk posed by infested mussel farms	Surveillance	Identify all infested mussel farms in region.	Should begin immediately with high risk mussel farms. Carry out risk profiling followed by inspection of farms.		
	Tracing	Backwards & forwards tracing of infested farms, equipment & vessels.	Urgent – begin with infested farms & identify other at-risk farms. Key risks are transfer of mussels from infested farms to new areas, movement of infested vessels between farms.		
	Organism management	Treat infested mussel farms.	Identify all feasible treatments, prioritise for on-farm use. Aim to collaborate with mussel farmers in first instance. May need to serve Notice of Direction & RPN if there is a lack of co-operation.		
Harbour surveillance	Surveillance	Ongoing programme – moorings, vessels, structures, mussel farms, seabed.	Supports ongoing elimination programme, started dd/mm/yy. Sabella on mussel farms not detected by surveillance programme – to adjust future surveillance programme.		
	Organism management	Hand removal of any Sabella found.	Supports ongoing elimination programme, started dd/mm/yy. Dependent on densities found & habitat found on.		
Regional marine	Surveillance	Develop surveillance plan for the coast region.	Regional surveillance to begin 2015/16 as part of long term plan for marine pests.		

biosecurity surveillance		Implement regional surveillance 2015/16.	Risk of detection of Sabella in other locations requiring further resources to achieve elimination from the region.		
	Organism management	Identify & undertake appropriate treatment methods.	Dependent on marine pest species, densities found & habitat found on.		

Expected Resource Requirements for this Response
• *E.g. staff numbers, physical resources*

Action Plan prepared by:		**Action Plan approved by:**	
Name		Name	
Position		Position	Incident Controller
Date		Date	