

Isle of Man Harbours and Tubeworms

We have identified a non-native species of Australian tubeworm (*Ficopomatus enigmaticus*), also known as trumpet tubeworm, or coral worm, on the hulls of several vessels that have recently been lifted out from **Peel Marina** for winter.

We have also been checking to see if any other of the Island's Harbours are affected. As of 19th October, we have identified more Australian tubeworm on a vessel that has been berthed in the outer harbour in **Douglas**. The vessel was found with a small amount of live tubeworm. As the vessel has been on a tidal berth, and drying out over the low tide periods, it is expected that the tubeworm spread has been restricted, and monitoring of Douglas inner harbour will be conducted to confirm this.

With an invasive species it is important to remain vigilant and report any suspected sightings to DEFA and/or Harbours as this will help in the monitoring of the situation and our understanding of the spread and the risk to our harbours.

What do we know about the Australian tubeworm?

Australian tubeworm is thought to have arrived in the UK on the bottom of cargo ships from the Asia-Pacific region at the start of the last century. For years it has thrived in the warmer waters of the south coast of the UK, but has been recorded as a problem as far north as Whitehaven where they have been dealing with this species for a number of years. The tubeworm is a filter feeder which creates a coral-like casing on any surface that it attaches to and is fast growing.



Extreme Australian tubeworm fouling at Southampton (Image: Rob Holland)

Australian tubeworm likes to settle and grow on exposed metallic objects such as propellers, shafts, outdrives, anodes and skin fittings. Growth on fibreglass hulls is limited but can be found in severe cases. Not all vessels are equally affected and so far we have seen variable

amounts of growth on different boats. The growth is relatively easily removed, and some boat owners have used hard brushes and scrapers to remove the casings from easily accessible areas.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE ARE MANY NATIVE SPECIES OF TUBEWORM – BUT THEY DO NOT LOOK LIKE AUSTRALIAN TUBE WORM.

So what does it look like?

- The images in this document show the main identifying characteristics of the tubeworm;
- Like many species of tubeworm, this species has **calcified (chalky) tubes around 1-3mm in diameter.**
- However, the invasive tubeworm also shows the following characteristics;
 - **Light brown colouration**, especially on recently-formed tubes and most visible when growth extends outwards;
 - Distinctive **white collars** on the tube (may be less obvious on flat growth form);
 - Distinctive **white flaring (trumpet shape)** of the end of the tube
- The tubeworm can form dense clumps of long extended tubes on some structures, especially if left undisturbed (see images). However, when the colony is new, or in disturbed conditions, the tubes may be sparse and flat – however the **three specific characteristics noted above** should still be visible.



Close up of Australian tubeworm showing flared ends, white collars and light brown colour
(Image: John Bishop, MBA)



High profile (extended) form: mature colony growth with extended long tubes on metal parts of vessel steering/propulsion system. (Image: DEFA)



Low profile (flat) form: Australian tubeworm in early stage or disturbed-environment, but characteristics are still visible. (Image: John Bishop, MBA)

What can you do to prevent it affecting your vessel?

Unfortunately, there is very little that can be done to prevent the growth of the tubeworms. You can clean the areas that are affected and running your engine in gear periodically to keep moving parts free. We advise that boat owners should carry out visual inspections, check cooling water and propulsion forward and astern prior to leaving a berth. Engines may labour at high revs if the prop is fouled so please check for unusual amounts of smoke being produced. Whilst running your engine, keep an eye on the temperature in case cooling water intake is compromised. Various products have been tested in other jurisdictions and they have reported propellers coated in Propshield being heavily fouled, but others with a hard propeller antifoul are less affected.

As a precaution, please take care when cleaning vessels and ensure that fouling does not go back into the water. This is a basic measure than can help limit its spread.

What can you do to help?

Report Sightings: If you suspect or spot Australian Tube Worm on your boat, hull, or in the marina, report it to the marina staff or DEFA. Include a good quality image if possible. Early detection is vital for us to help control the spread. **See contact details below.**

Inspect your Boat Regularly: Make it a habit to inspect your boat's hull and equipment for any signs of Australian Tube Worm or its encrusted tubes. Pay particular attention to areas with low water flow, where the worms are more likely to attach.

Clean your Boat Properly: Ensure your boat is cleaned thoroughly during any lift outs for storage or maintenance. Pressure washing and scrubbing the hull can help remove any attached organisms. Use non-toxic and eco-friendly cleaning products.

Properly Dispose of Waste: Dispose of any cleaning materials and removed organisms properly and try to prevent the return of the tubeworms to the water.

Use Anti-fouling Paint: Consider using anti-fouling paints on your boat's hull to deter the attachment of invasive species. Choose products that are effective against Australian Tube Worm; you can find information about this online.

Stop the Spread and Practice Good Boating Hygiene: Encourage fellow boat owners to follow best practices in preventing the spread of invasive species. Consider the ports you visit, find out if they have any specific problems with invasive species, and act accordingly. For example, if you are usually based in Peel marina, have you inspected your boat before travelling to other Manx harbours? This is important, especially in warmer months when the worm is breeding.

Stay Informed: Keep yourself updated on any developments related to Australian tubeworms in the Harbours of the Island, or in other harbours that you may visit.

Be Patient and Persistent: Dealing with invasive species is an ongoing process. It may take time to effectively manage or eradicate them.

Who Should I Report to?

You can report suspected trumpet tubeworm to the following;

- DoI Harbours:
 - Email: harbours@gov.im
 - Phone: (+44) 01624 686627
- DEFA:
 - Email: fisheries@gov.im
 - Phone: (+44) 01624 685857

Further information on Invasive Non Native Species (INNS)

- **DEFA Invasive Species (General):** <https://www.gov.im/about-the-government/departments/environment-food-and-agriculture/environment-directorate/ecosystem-policy-team/invasive-non-native-species/>
- **DEFA Marine Invasive Species:** <https://www.gov.im/about-the-government/departments/environment-food-and-agriculture/environment-directorate/ecosystem-policy-team/invasive-non-native-species/marine-invasive-non-native-species-inns/>
- **Manx Wildlife Trust:** [https://www.mwt.im/citizen-science/invasive-non-native-species#:~:text=Invasive%20Non%2DNative%20Species%20\(INNS,impact%20food%20chains%20and%20biodiversity.](https://www.mwt.im/citizen-science/invasive-non-native-species#:~:text=Invasive%20Non%2DNative%20Species%20(INNS,impact%20food%20chains%20and%20biodiversity.)

UK Websites: <https://www.nonnativespecies.org/assets/MBA-NNS-Guide-2020-1.6-MB.pdf>