



Biosecurity alert: Carpet sea squirt

(*Didemnum vexillum*)

The carpet sea squirt (*Didemnum vexillum*) is an invasive colonial ascidian. It can be transported around the world via ballast water and by attaching to marine vessels or aquaculture equipment. It is an invasive species in many countries and has the potential to become a major pest in Western Australia.



LOOK for this pest

This colonial ascidian species has a yellowish, dripping, waxy appearance, with dense colonies of microscopic zooids (individual animals). It can grow and spread very quickly, smothering other species and habitats, interfering with fishing, aquaculture, and other activities. It can grow on solid surfaces such as rocks, mussels, oysters, and seagrass, and artificial structures like docks, wharves, boat hulls, lines, and nets.

Key points:

- Grows over most substrates
- Pale yellow, tan or cream in colour
- Surface is smooth and leathery with translucent gelatinous canals
- Found mostly in the lower intertidal but also in depths to 65m
- Larger colonies (>20cm) grow frond-like globular outgrowths that look like 'dripping wax'
- Difficult to identify and easily confused with other sea squirts and sponge animals

Similar species: White colonial sea squirt (*Didemnum perlucidum*)

Didemnum vexillum can look very similar to the white colonial sea squirt (*Didemnum perlucidum*), which is identified by its bright white colour. Both are colonial ascidians that can grow over most substrates. However, *Didemnum perlucidum* is known to occur throughout Western Australia.



Didemnum perlucidum smothering seagrass in the Swan River.



A comparison of *Didemnum perlucidum* (white colony - top of photo), and *Didemnum vexillum* (yellow colony, bottom).

Help stop the spread – keep your boat CLEAN

Didemnum vexillum is particularly invasive as it can reproduce both sexually and asexually. It releases larvae into the water column that can settle on any suitable substrate. Fragments can also disperse and form whole colonies. If a small section breaks off, it can regrow into an entirely new colony – so DO NOT attempt to remove this species in water. It is vital to move your boat, or other equipment, completely out of the water before cleaning and dispose of any waste material appropriately on land.

How to prevent spread

- Keep your hull and marine/fishing equipment clean and free of fouling
- Clean on land. *Didemnum vexillum* can spread from fragments
- Ensure fouling marine life does not re-enter the water when cleaning
- Do not attempt to remove the species in water



REPORT this pest

Take photos and report sightings to FISHWATCH 24-hour hotline 1800 815 507.



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