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In-water cleaning of biofouling can be an important part of a vessel's hull maintenance regime; however, cleaning of macrofouling in a different location to where the fouling was acquired presents biosecurity risks to the receiving port. To manage this biosecurity risk, the New Zealand has rules around what type of in-water hull cleaning is allowed on international vessels.

In all cases, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) advocate cleaning in the port where the fouling was acquired ("clean before you leave") as part of best practice hull maintenance.

Is in-water cleaning of macrofouling allowed on international vessels visiting New Zealand?

No. Currently, there are no approved options for in-water cleaning of macrofouling on international vessels within New Zealand waters. Under the Biosecurity Act 1993, any person (e.g. this would include a contractor) who causes or permits the removal of macrofouling on an international vessel may be committing an offence.

Macrofouling on an international vessel visiting New Zealand is a risk good and deemed to be uncleared goods under the Act. Macrofouling is any fouling in excess of a slime layer.



Slime layer



Macrofouling

In-water cleaning of macrofouling on international vessels presents a biosecurity risk, as cleaning may fragment organisms or cause them to spawn, increasing the risk of establishment in New Zealand waters. Species introduced in this manner have the potential to become marine pests, and can have detrimental and costly effects on New Zealand's unique coastal environment and important aquaculture and fisheries industries.

As more biosecure in-water cleaning technologies are developed and become available in New Zealand, MPI will consider approving providers of these services. However, there are currently no technologies available in New Zealand that have been shown to sufficiently manage the biosecurity risk associated with in-water cleaning.

Operators intending to clean domestic vessels should check the requirements of their local regional council in order to determine under what conditions in-water cleaning of macrofouling is allowed in that region.

MPI discourages in-water cleaning of macrofouling outside of New Zealand territorial waters (NZT; 12nm), as these activities still present biosecurity risks to New Zealand's coastal environment. However, these activities are not explicitly restricted under the Biosecurity Act. MPI recommends that any vessel operator or diving service provider choosing to engage in in-water cleaning outside of NZT do so off of the East Cape of the North Island, as currents in this area are more likely to carry the risk offshore.



Is in-water slime layer grooming allowed on international vessels visiting New Zealand?

Yes, slime layer grooming is allowed on international vessels in New Zealand.

Proactive slime layer grooming is considered an important part of best practice hull maintenance, and does not present a biosecurity risk to New Zealand. Slime layer grooming should be done with tools that do not damage the antifouling coating, and providers should have the appropriate resource consents for any discharges associated with grooming activities. Both the vessel operator and diving service provider should take steps to ensure that no macrofouling is removed as a consequence of these services.

Is propeller polishing allowed on international vessels visiting New Zealand?

Propeller polishing is only allowed on international vessels when the fouling on the propeller does not exceed a slime layer. The removal of macrofouling during propeller polishing is an offence. The same biosecurity risks associated with cleaning of macrofouling on the hull and niche areas applies to propeller polishing activities.

What is the difference between an international vessel and a domestic vessel?

International vessels are those vessels visiting New Zealand temporarily and that have not received full biosecurity clearance from MPI. These vessels generally fall under the “short-stay” category of the Craft Risk Management Standard (CRMS) for Biofouling. Note that the above rules apply to all international vessels, including those that have been found compliant with the CRMS.

Domestic vessels are those that are based in New Zealand permanently, or have received full biosecurity clearance from MPI. “Long-stay” vessels that are compliant with the CRMS and other biosecurity requirements are granted full biosecurity clearance, and become “domestic” vessels for the duration of their stay in New Zealand. There are no restrictions on in-water cleaning of domestic vessels, provided the activities meet local council rules.

What is the risk associated with in-water cleaning on international vessels?

In-water cleaning poses a biosecurity risk due to its potential to facilitate the release of non-indigenous species into the marine environment. As many biofouling organisms are clonal and/or capable of regenerating from fragments, much or all of the macrofouling removed via in-water cleaning may remain viable and capable of establishing in the receiving environment. Therefore, any in-water removal of macrofouling on international vessels has the potential to introduce harmful marine species to New Zealand’s waters.

In addition to biosecurity risks, in-water cleaning can result in the release of harmful biocides into the marine environment. In particular, cleaning of hard macrofouling has the potential to release large amounts of biocides (for example, between 68-300kg of copper may be released during in-water cleaning of commercial vessels).

If you have any questions regarding the rules for in-water cleaning of biofouling on international vessels, please contact standards@mpi.govt.nz