

**September 2020**



## **Dublin City Council Information Bulletin**

### **Dublin Bay – The presence of Ectocarpus along our shoreline.**

The Environment & Transportation Department has received a number of complaints in recent weeks with regard to a nuisance algae washing up on our coastal beaches. Mistakenly, these complaints typically identify this nuisance algae as sewage effluent and associate it with discharge from the Ringsend Waste Water Treatment Plant. We wish to take this opportunity to inform Dublin City Council staff as to the lifecycle and nature of this plant life in Dublin Bay, and provide you with a reference for any future queries which members of the public may raise.

Dublin Bay biosphere has a various vegetation types growing on its sea bed, much of which is within a Special Area of Conservation. This particular material is currently both floating in the sea water and washing up onto coastal marshes and beaches during high tides. It is a naturally occurring seaweed or macro algae called Ectocarpus. Toward the end of its lifecycle Ectocarpus quickly progresses through various stages of decay and it is at this time of year the decaying ectocarpus presents itself with characteristics not too dissimilar to foul effluent or sewage.

Ectocarpus siliculosus is considered to be a naturally occurring nuisance species. Typically growing on the seabed from early springtime until the end of its lifecycle in the autumn when it dies out. At this time of year the seaweed is decaying and becoming uprooted from the sea bed and washing ashore at various locations along Dublin Bay.

When ectocarpus begins to physically degrade, it can produce a malodour (not dissimilar to sewage), as experienced by the public whom have contacted our Department. Also its colour dissipates from a healthy green colour to light then dark brown as it continues to decay in the water or beaches or marsh, (visually not dissimilar to sewage either). Furthermore, when the weed washes ashore onto the beach after a high tide, the seaweed dries out and may be incorrectly identified as caked sewage. This is a natural process within Dublin bay's rich bio-diversity and for environmental reasons the algae may not be removed from its environment.

Please note that Merrion, Sandymount and Dollymount Strands are among the various beaches and bathing areas which are inspected by Dublin City Council staff on an ongoing basis throughout the year, with water samples taken up to 20 times during the bathing season between June and mid-September and on a fortnightly basis throughout the remainder of the year. The water sample results are updated on the Dublin City Council website and [www.beaches.ie](http://www.beaches.ie) for the public's information.

Furthermore, we are aware that after the recent heavy rainfall, combined with high tides, decaying ectocarpus can be washed up on the various footpaths or promenades adjacent to the coastline. Our Waste Management Department does tend to these incidents so as to make pedestrian footways safe and ensuring minimal relocation of this natural material from its environment.

**Contact:** Andy Walsh, Executive Manager (Engineering),  
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**Photographs of Ectocarpus for reference purposes.**



Shelly Banks – Brown ectocarpus washing ashore in the seawater, (Sept. 2019)



Causeway Road, Bull Island – Green ectocarpus floating on high tide waters, (Sept. 2019)



Bull Island – (Light brown) Dried ectocarpus resting on top of the marshes once high tide waters recede, (Sept. 2019).



Merrion Strand – (Dark brown) recently washed up ectocarpus on the beach once tidal waters recede, (Sept. 2018).





Sandymount Promenade – Ectocarpus washed onto the rocks footpaths during a combination of heavy rainfall and high tides, (Oct. 2019).



Sandymount Beach – Ectocarpus at various stages of decay, (Oct. 2016).