

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



New study finds Derwent is filled with underwater interlopers

A recent study of the marine life in the Derwent Estuary has revealed some disturbing and obvious scars left by human activities.

Reef Life Survey (RLS), a national marine science and conservation program, recently undertook an extensive survey of marine life in the Derwent, and in doing so engaged the skills of an active and dedicated team of local volunteer SCUBA divers.

UTAS hosts the RLS dataset and provides scientific support to the program, which brings together a dynamic mix of scientists, marine managers and recreational SCUBA divers.

The comprehensive study recorded all the fish species and larger invertebrates (such as sea stars, sea urchins and sea shells) on areas of rocky reef within the Derwent Estuary.

Dr Rick Stuart-Smith, from the UTAS Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) said the results were startling.

“Although the Derwent is home to some unique and globally significant fauna, like the endangered spotted handfish, it is also heavily impacted and, of particular concern is the abundance of fish and invertebrate species that are not native to Tasmania - they are so common in some areas they totally dominate,” he said.

“Not a single native species was found on the sea floor in some areas of rocky reef close to the Hobart Port.”

The study also looked at the marine life in Sydney Harbour and Port Phillip Bay and discovered that, surprisingly, rocky reefs in the Derwent contained many more introduced fish and large invertebrates than these bays at the doorstep of much larger cities.

The results were not all so sobering though, with some rare fish species also being recorded by the RLS team, and areas of rocky reef in the lower estuary appearing reasonably healthy.

More information about these species and the results of the study, along with images of the marine life in the Derwent, has been compiled into a presentation and is available on custom USB sticks.

If you would like a USB stick they can be picked up from offices of the Derwent Estuary Program, NRM South or the UTAS IMAS Taroona campus.

More information on the Derwent Estuary is available through the Derwent Estuary Program, which aims to restore and promote our estuary - www.derwentestuary.org.au

For more information on the Reef Life Survey program, please visit www.reeflifesurvey.com

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