

# Killer Seaweed Invades PEI

By Aldera Chisholm

With files from Rebecca MacEachern, The Xaverian, St. FX

A new type of seaweed has been discovered in the Maritimes. *Codium Fragile* is commonly known as Green Fleece, and it was first found in Nova Scotia by St. F.X. professor David Garbary. Garbary found the seaweed while walking along a beach last August. "It was pretty neat to be just wandering along the beach and find it," said Garbary, who specializes in the study of seaweed. It is not just specialized scientists who are taking note of this find; Garbary warns that the spread of Green Fleece "could lead to a major ecological disaster."

The seaweed poses a hazard to the Maritime shellfish industry and the PEI Irish Moss Industry. The Green Fleece can reproduce by splitting and through spores, mak-

ing it an extremely fast growing algae. This means that it will compete with, and possibly displace, slower growing algae such as Irish Moss. Irish Moss is a local algae harvested on PEI, and it is used as a thickener for some dairy products such as ice cream.

Then the shellfish are washed away with the tide," says Professor Garbary. While the seaweed harms individual shellfish, it is unlikely to destroy entire beds. Garbary compared the devastation of Green Fleece with that caused by Purple Loosestrife: "Actu-

ally, you could describe *Codium* as the Purple Loosestrife of the sea."

Green Fleece originated in Europe and is thought to have travelled to Nova Scotia in the 1950's on fishing boats. The seaweed has now made it's way to PEI, according to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). "I have seen it personally," said Jim Jenkins of the DFO. He found the seaweed on a routine mid-November oyster inspection in Upper Malpeque Bay. "We were searching for virus and parasites, not *Codium Fragile*," he noted. Jenkins found entire plants of the seaweed, which he describes as being 8-10 inches in length, and appearing like a fingery, spongy material. He speculated that the Green Fleece was brought

to PEI by Nova Scotia oysters. The DFO is unsure how long the Green Fleece has been in Malpeque Bay. Moira Galway, associate professor of Biology at St. F.X. says the find should be taken seriously. "It's something to be concerned about. I think it's good that it has been found at an early stage. It's better that we know it's here now."

While Jenkins agrees that the new seaweed is a cause for concern, he explained that there are several harmful varieties of seaweed which are considered harmful "Sea Lettuce is more of a pest," said Jenkins. Sea Lettuce is an algae which is indigenous to PEI. Professor Christian LaCroix, of the UPEI biology department explained that any type of fast growth algae, like Sea Lettuce or Green Fleece, can be harmful to Irish Moss. LaCroix stated that any type of faster growing algae can compete with, and overcome, slow growing algae such as Irish Moss.

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Green Fleece often spreads its spores through oysters and other shellfish. "The spores of the seaweed attach themselves to scallops and oysters and grow quickly, creating little air bubbles which cause the shellfish to float.

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