

Seaweed menace may yield new medicines

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An invasive seaweed clogging up British coasts could be a blessing in disguise. University of Greenwich scientists have won a cash award to turn it into valuable compounds which can lead to new, life-saving drugs.

Dr John Milledge and Dr Birthe Nielsen, from the university's Faculty of Engineering & Science, have been awarded a £5,000 voucher by the High Value Chemicals from Plants Network to unlock the potential of *Sargassum muticum*, more commonly known as Japanese wireweed.

Dr Milledge, a Research Fellow at the university, says: "This [seaweed](#) is causing acute global ecological problems from the Kent coast to California and its destruction is currently carried out at considerable financial and energy cost.

"Our challenge is to discover if *Sargassum muticum* can yield useful biologically active compounds that transform a disposal problem into a commercial opportunity."

Wireweed competes with native sea plants and is a nuisance in harbours where it can become entangled in boat propellers.

The [university](#), a prominent player in algal biorefining, will research the seaweed in collaboration with drug discovery business IOTA Pharmaceuticals.

Dr David Bailey, Chief Executive of IOTA, says: "Over half the medicines used in healthcare have their origins in natural products.

Algae and other microbes are rich sources of high value chemicals, some of which we will evaluate as novel starting points in our drug discovery programmes."

Wireweed is already used in traditional Chinese medicines.

Provided by University of Greenwich

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