



# Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

**19 May 2009**

Seagrass-Watch's electronic news service, providing marine and coastal news of international and national interest. Abbreviated articles are presented with links to their source. Seagrass-Watch HQ recommends that readers exercise their own skill and care with respect to their use of the information in this bulletin and that readers carefully evaluate the accuracy, currency, completeness and relevance of the material in the bulletin for their purposes. You are free to distribute it amongst your own networks.

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## NEWS

### **Florida Bay proposals would restrict boaters (USA)**

17 May 2009, Los Angeles Times

Everglades National Park officials say powerboats have damaged seagrass that supports animal life. The fishing community is concerned the measures go too far.

Concerned that powerboats are tearing up seagrass in Florida Bay, Everglades National Park has proposed a range of possible restrictions on boaters to protect a vast, shallow estuary that supports sea turtles, fish and wading birds. The proposals have generated deep concern among South Florida's recreational fishing community, where many people worry that the most drastic alternatives could shut them out of most of the bay and hurt the tourism industry.

But park officials say boats have carved at least 325 miles of scars into the bay, with the damage accelerating in an era of bigger boats, more powerful engines and tough stainless-steel propellers that enable boaters to penetrate shallow, difficult-to-navigate areas.

more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>

Related articles: [http://www.palmbeachpost.com/storm/content/local\\_news/epaper/2009/05/17/0517floridabay.html](http://www.palmbeachpost.com/storm/content/local_news/epaper/2009/05/17/0517floridabay.html)

[http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/2009/05/12/Anglers-fret-over-Florida-Bay-regulations/UPI-53651242153567/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2009/05/12/Anglers-fret-over-Florida-Bay-regulations/UPI-53651242153567/)

### **UQ & Sea World team up on groundbreaking dugong research (Brisbane, Queensland, Australia)**

15 May 2009, UQ News

Biologists from the University of Queensland have teamed up with Sea World and Sydney Aquarium to assess the health and reproductive status of wild dugongs in Moreton Bay this week.

Leader of the UQ Dugong Research Team, Dr Janet Lanyon from UQ's School of Biological Sciences, said determining reproductive status of individuals was one of the most important factors for population modelling and effective management of a vulnerable species. "Assessing the health of these animals is a valuable tool in determining the fitness of wildlife populations; and marine mammals such as dugongs may be used as sentinels for emerging threats to coastal seagrass ecosystems."

more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>

Related article: <http://news.ninensn.com.au/national/814377/qlds-wild-dugongs-to-be-studied>

### **Nakheel responds to claims over waste (Dubai, United Arab Emirates)**

15 May 2009, Construction Week Online

The Gulf has been littered by more than 200,000 tonnes of waste as a result of coastal property development in Dubai, the president of Emirates Marine Environmental Group (Emeg) has said. The group has been working closely with Nakheel in the Waterfront and Palm Jebel Ali areas to assist with monitoring the effects of the developer's coastal projects on the Gulf.

Nakheel is funding the work. "In Waterfront and Jebel Ali we have pulled more than 200,000 tonnes of waste from the water, most of which we recycle," Emeg president Ali Saqar Al Suweidin told Construction Week. Al Suweidi also said that dredging work had covered large sections of seagrass on the ocean bed, a favoured food of the green turtle, an endangered species.

Emeg has been called in to deal with around 50 cases of green turtles being washed ashore along the coast of Dubai through fatigue. The group's marine programme director Rima Jabado agreed that the loss of seagrass due to sedimentation was a threat to the health of the green turtle population.

more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>

### **UK Seahorse tagging project at Studland Bay in Dorset (Hereford, England, UK)**

14 May 2009 Wildlife Extra

The Seahorse Trust has been surveying British Seahorses since 1994 through its British Seahorse Survey and in early 2008 we achieved the full named protection of both native species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981 schedule 5). This monumental break through took six years to obtain and it also included the protection of the habitat Seahorses are found in, which was a major bonus to the legislation.

The Seahorse Trust has been monitoring a number of sites around the UK, one of which is in Studland Bay in Dorset which has turned out to be a site of International importance. The bay is under major threat of damage due the large number of pleasure craft that use it, particularly during the summer months. The pleasure craft anchor in the seagrass meadow, causing serious damage, as well the seemingly endless amount of litter and rubbish they dump into the bay.

more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>

### **Seagrass link to seahorse upright posture (Australia)**

06 May 2009, ABC Science Online

Seahorses evolved their upright posture some 25 million years ago, thanks in part to an expansion of vertical seagrass habitat, Australian researchers have found. Associate Professor Luciano Beheregaray of Flinders University and Dr Peter Teske of Macquarie University report their findings in the journal Biology Letters today.

Beheregaray says it has been hard for scientists to work out when exactly seahorses evolved to swim upright. This is because there are only two known fossils of seahorses - the oldest dating back to 13 million years - and no link between these and horizontally-swimming fish had been found.

The researchers used the two existing fossil seahorses to calibrate the rate of evolution of DNA in their molecular clock. And they discovered that the last common ancestor of seahorses and pygmy pipehorses lived around 25 to 28 million years ago. Beheregaray says at the time that seahorses arose during the Oligocene epoch coincided with the

formation of vast areas of shallow water and expansion of seagrass in Australasia - where Teske has previously showed seahorses first evolved.

*more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>*

*Related article: <http://dsc.discovery.com/news/2009/05/06/seahorses-stand-up.html>*

### **Govt rejects ocean dumping plan (Australia)**

*04 May 2009, ABC online*

The Queensland Government has refused plans to allow the dumping of dredge waste back into the ocean at Port Hinchinbrook, near Cardwell in north Queensland.

Developers of the Port Hinchinbrook resort and marina had applied for permission to dump the waste back into the ocean as they dredge to allow better access for boats. Sustainability Minister Kate Jones rejected the plan, saying the area was too environmentally sensitive.

The Alliance to Save Hinchinbrook's spokeswoman, Margaret Moorhouse, has welcomed the news. "Sea dumping is a very, very dirty activity and this is in an area where the seagrass meadows are the livelihood of the dugongs in particular, but many other sea creatures as well," she said.

*more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>*

### **Seagrass in Sarasota Bay makes big comeback (Sarasota, FL, USA)**

*17 May 2009, Sarasota Herald-Tribune*

Using aerial photographs and mapping software, new studies put the amount of seagrass in Sarasota Bay more than 25 percent above where it was in 1948. Seagrass is considered the gold standard in measuring the water quality of estuaries.

The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program recently completed a seagrass study comparing aerial photographs taken between 1948 and 1951 and ones taken in 2006. The study showed roughly equal amounts in the two sets of photos. And photos taken in 2008 show a 32 percent increase in seagrass since 2006 in Upper Sarasota Bay, according to an early version of a state report. To put that into perspective, the Sarasota estuaries gained 1,200 acres of seagrass between 1988 and 2006, an 18-year period.

In just two years, Sarasota Bay alone gained 2,700 acres, with two-thirds of that coming in Manatee County waters, according to the new Southwest Florida Water Management District maps.

*Full story and source: <http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20090517/ARTICLE/905171042/-1/NEWSITEMAP>*

### **Dump wonderland (Malaysia)**

*16 May 2009, Malaysia Star*

A fun tide pool walk in Singapore reveals a dynamic and rich marine ecosystem, and would you believe it's in a landfill! The intertidal walk, run by National University of Singapore's Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research (RMBR), is on Pulau Semakau, 8km south of Singapore's main island, which ironically is also the country's only landfill.

Opened in 1999, Semakau also prides itself as being a biodiversity hotspot that harbours rich marine life, including rare plant and animal species. Aside from a working landfill, you'll also see mangroves, sandy shores, seagrass meadows and coral reefs.

Since Semakau opened as a recreational area in July 2005, RMBR has done 60 walks for the public, schools and government agencies, and reached out to about 2,437 participants, says RMBR's education and research officer Wang Luan Keng. Semakau is open to the public only via the various interest groups. "Our long-term goal is to see Pulau Semakau protected as a marine park for our present and future generations to enjoy and appreciate."

Another passionate proponent of Semakau is environmental activist and ecology expert, Ria Tan. The Singaporean single-handedly runs the popular website, Wild Singapore, which stores a cache of information on natural areas in Singapore, flora and fauna species, photo galleries and event/activity announcements. "With probably the largest mangroves, seagrass areas and coral reefs in Singapore, Semakau is a spectacular place to share with members of the public" according to Tan over an e-mail interview.

*Read more on Pulau Semakau: <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Singapore.html#PS1>, <http://teamseagrass.blogspot.com/>*

*Full story and source: <http://thestar.com.my/lifestyle/story.asp?file=/2009/5/16/lifefocus/3781372&sec=lifefocus>*

### **Tampa Bay Grass Helped by Drought (Lakeland, FL, USA)**

*15 May 2009, The Ledger*

Turns out the drought that's been turning lawns brown all over Tampa Bay is actually beneficial for one type of plant: Seagrass. The grasses are the leading indicator of the health of Tampa Bay, and the latest figures show that seagrass beds have now expanded to cover more of the bay than at any time since the 1950s.

A big reason for that is the drought that has been going on for the past three years, which has led to the tightest lawn-sprinkling restrictions in history. The reduction in rainfall and lawn-watering means there's less polluted runoff flowing into the bay and killing the seagrass, explained Kris Kaufman, the state scientist in charge of the seagrass study.

Tampa Bay now has about 29,647 acres of seagrass, which is 1,300 acres more than the last time the scientists checked two years ago. Hillsborough Bay, traditionally the most polluted area of Tampa Bay, nearly doubled its seagrass coverage, from 415 to 810 acres in the two-year period. The biggest increases were documented in Middle Tampa Bay, which extends from the Gandy Bridge to the Manatee County line, where sea grasses expanded by 31 percent.

*Full story and source:* <http://www.theledger.com/article/20090514/NEWS/905155013/1374?Title=Tampa-Bay-Grass-Helped-by-Drought>

*Related articles:* <http://www.tampabay.com/news/columnist/story.aspx?storyid=105812&catid=79>

<http://www2.tbo.com/content/2009/may/12/121517/sea-grass-continues-recovery-tampa-bay/news-breaking/>

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/environment/water/article999925.ece>

### **Restoring Habitat (Mobile, AL, USA)**

*05 May 2009, Press-Register - al.com*

GULF SHORES — Planting seagrasses is muddy, unglamorous work. And unlike planting, say, an Arbor Day tree or a swath of sea oats, the fruits of the endeavor aren't even immediately visible. The effort, such as that taken by Dauphin Island Sea Lab researchers and a score of volunteers along Little Lagoon's northern shore last week, should have a lasting impact on water quality and aquatic habitat, though.

From Thursday to Sunday the volunteers and scientists planted 16 patches of shoal grass and widgeon grass just west of Childress Point off the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge's Jeff Friend Trail. The restoration has been in the works for more than a year, and the beds will be monitored as part of the sea lab's research for at least two more years, said Bart Christiaan, a doctoral candidate who headed the project.

Scientists estimate that Perdido Bay, like Florida's other marine habitats, had 70 percent more seagrass beds in 1930 than it does now. And it's reasonable to assume that Alabama's waters, including Little Lagoon, have seen a similar decrease in aquatic plants.

*Full story and source:* <http://www.al.com/news/press-register/baldwin.ssf?/base/news/1241514967307260.xml&coll=3>

### **Health risk 'exaggerated' (Western Australia, Australia)**

*06 May 2009, Busselton Dunsborough Mail*

A toxicologist engaged by Port Geographe Action Group has been accused of exaggerating the longer-term health effects, that are odour related, on residents. This is contained in a report by the WA Health Department on the odour impact associated with the depositing and removal of seagrass at Port Geographe.

However, the PGAG has slammed the "horror" report, claiming it confirmed its analysis that residents were exposed to hydrogen sulphide levels that were over the World Health Organisation's general public limits. The PGAG initiated a survey of health complaints, an air monitoring of hydrogen sulphide levels, and had the data assessed by a US toxicologist, Dr Jack Thrasher.

The Health Department report examined the likely health risks associated with community odour impacts associated with seagrass deposition and the removal operations at Port Geographe. It conceded that Port Geographe had had major seagrass deposition periods each winter since marina breakwaters were installed in the late 1990s. The seagrass decomposition had generated an unpleasant odour, primarily consisting of hydrogen sulphide gas.

*Full story and source:* <http://busselton.yourguide.com.au/news/local/news/general/health-risk-exaggerated/1505882.aspx?storypage=0>

### **Guimaras oil-spill survivors recover but scarred (Philippines)**

*03 May 2009, Business Mirror*

More than two years after the oil spill off Guimaras island, people from communities that were affected by the tragedy have recovered and are now back on their feet, though scarred by incident. The communities were in the provinces of Guimaras and Iloilo.

While sporadic traces of oil and grease left behind by the coastal cleanup to restore the region's marine ecosystem have by now been swept away by the rains and the tides—Mother Nature's way of cleansing itself of toxic pollution—the scars left behind in the minds of the people still remain.

Oil and grease are a grim reminder of what happened after the August 11, 2006, sinking of the MV Solar 1, the tanker chartered by Petron Corp. It spilled over 2 million liters of bunker fuel oil and affected 36 coastal barangays in Guimaras, including the Taklong Island National Marine Reserve, six coastal areas in Ajuy and one in Concepcion in Iloilo. The oil spill has affected over 1,000 hectares of mangrove areas, destroyed coral reefs, killed seabeds and seagrass and other marine life, and drove away fish that used to feed in the coastal waters.

*Full story and source:* <http://businessmirror.com.ph/home/regions/9694-guimaras-oil-spill-survivors-recover-but-scarred.html>

## **The Nature Conservancy Awarded \$500,000 for Seagrass Restoration Research in Long Island and Connecticut Waters (Arlington, VA, USA)**

01 May 2009, The Nature Conservancy

Seagrass has received a significant boost thanks to a \$500,000 research grant (H.R. 1105, the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009) co-sponsored by Congressman Timothy Bishop (NY-01) and Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (CT-03).

"We applaud Representatives Bishop and DeLauro for recognizing the value of seagrass to our marine environment. Thanks to their efforts, we now have the necessary steps in place to protect this vital resource", said Nancy Kelley, executive director of The Nature Conservancy on Long Island. "Our region is experiencing an ongoing decline in seagrass abundance, with some areas having lost over 50 percent of their historic acreage," Kelley stated.

"Efforts to rebuild populations of fish and shellfish such as Peconic Bay scallops are unlikely to achieve long-term success without adequate protection and restoration of seagrass," said Congressman Tim Bishop. "This research is an important part in a suite of strategies to properly manage our precious marine environments for future generations. We have an opportunity to act now to get to the bottom of the problem, before it's too late."

The intent of the proposed seagrass work is to identify gaps in baseline information as well as necessary primary and restoration research that will piece together regional solutions for protecting and restoring known and potential seagrass communities. In particular, the work will lead to the identifying locations in Southern New England and New York where seagrass restoration has the best chance for success. "The proposed science-based approach to finding solutions for protecting and enhancing this regional natural resource shows innovation that also will likely create job opportunities to researchers and practitioners engaged in the effort," said Congresswoman DeLauro.

*Full story and source: <http://www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/newyork/press/press4013.html>*

## **Entire fish species disappearing from M'sian waters (Malaysia)**

28 April 2009, Malaysia Star

GEORGETOWN: More than 80 types of fish have either become extinct or gone missing from local waters, said Sahabat Alam Malaysia president S. M. Mohd Idris. These include various varieties of yu, pari, gelama, pelata, bagok, semilang and kurau.

Describing the situation as alarming, Mohd Idris said it was high time the authorities implemented preventive measures to safeguard the fisheries sector. "The authorities must also take measures to check the destruction of marine life habitats. There must be a concerted effort to protect mangrove forests, sea grass and coral reefs," he said.

He said that the impact of modern fishery practices must also be looked into, and added that there was no long-term policy to protect the coastal ecosystem. "Extinction, over-exploitation and the depletion of fisheries resources must be addressed in the fourth Malaysian Fisheries Policy that is currently being formulated. "Draft copies of the policy should be made available to the public, and a platform must be given for groups to give feedback and highlight concerns," he added.

*Full story and source: <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2009/4/28/nation/20090428191520&sec=nation>*

## **CONFERENCES**

### **CERF 2009 (Oregon (USA), 1 -5 November 2009)**

Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation Conference (CERF) will host a seagrass program titled, "Seagrass Ecosystem Health in a Global Perspective", including the following four half day sessions:

- Seagrass Physiological Stress: In Sickness and in Health (SCI-108)
- Seagrass Assessment: Think Globally, Monitor Locally (SCI-105)
- Seagrass Ecological Health: Diagnosing the Canary (SCI-106)
- Seagrass Management and Policy: Proactive Sustainability (SCI-107)

More information: <http://erf.org/cerf2009/>

## **GALLERY**

### **Labrador (Singapore): 13 May 2009 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>**

*Team Seagrass visited Labrador today with Len McKenzie (Seagrass-Watch Program Leader). Also attending was Chen Puay aka Mr Lim who has been valiantly leading his young ladies from RGS in monitoring and learning about this special mainland seagrass meadow.*

**Bali Workshop (Level 1): 09 May 2009** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

*Workshop participants were from a diverse range of academic, government and non-government organisations, including: University of Udayana, Bogor Agricultural University (CCMRS/PKSPL – IPB), Mataram University, Institute for Marine Research and Observation (IMRO), Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, The Indonesian Coral Reef Foundation (TERANGI), Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).*

**Mer Island (Torres Strait): 05 - 07 May 2009** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

*The dominant seagrass within the site was *Cymodocea rotundata* and *Thalassia hemprichii*. Within the meadow though we also found *Halodule uninervis*, *Enhalus* and *Halophila ovalis*. The seagrass plants all showed evidence of heavy grazing by turtles and fish.*

**Singapore Workshop (Level 1 & 2): 01 - 03 May 2009** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

*Seagrass-Watch HQ visited Singapore for the Labour Day long weekend to catch-up with TeamSeagrass and conduct both Level 1 (basic) and Level 2 (refresher) workshops.*

**FROM HQ**

**Frequently Asked Questions** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/faq.html>

**Seagrass-Watch News Issue 36** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/newsletters.html>

**Seagrass-Watch Shop** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/shop.html>

**Virtual Herbarium** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/herbarium.html>

**Giveaways** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/shop.html#GIVE1>

**Future sampling dates** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/sampling.html>

**Handy Seagrass Links** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/links.html>

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Seagrass-Watch HQ is supported by the Australian Government's Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility (Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts) represented in North Queensland by the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries (part of the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation) and by private donations.

Seagrass-Watch E- Bulletin is compiled by Len McKenzie & Rudi Yoshida.