



Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

30 March 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

Big Year ahead for Seagrass-Watch in Torres Strait (Torres Strait, Australia)

18-24 March 2009 Torres News

2009 is shaping up to be a big year for Seagrass-Watch in the Torres Strait. Torres project coordinator Jane Mellors said that, in addition to continuing the regular monitoring at Battery Point, Front Beach, Thursday Island and sites at Horn Island and Hammond Island, Seagrass-Watch will expand to Mabiliaug Island. Seagrass is vital to sustain the growth of fisheries resources, and is a good indicator of ocean health.

On Mabiliaug, Seagrass-Watch will be working closely with Rangers and Dugong and Turtle Project Officers, while continuing the program's close partnership with Tagai College. "Once we have our intertidal sites up and running on Mabiliaug, we are looking at trialing a subtidal monitoring methodology using underwater cameras. This monitoring methodology will be assessed by the Mabiliaug Rangers for its practicality in maintaining a long-term subtidal Seagrass-Watch site."

The selection of a suitable seagrass site for the underwater camera trial will be determined during a survey that DPI&F are undertaking on behalf the Torres Strait Regional Authority Land and Sea Unit surveying marine habitats in the Torres Strait that are at greatest risk from Shipping accidents and oil spills.

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

Another dugong dies (Persekutuan, Malaysia)

29 March 2009, *New Straits Times*

Dugong deaths in the waters off Johor are occurring again. Two of the marine herbivores, which are listed as protected species and considered a part of Johor's heritage, have been found dead over a span of a week.

Since the much-publicised death of a baby dugong named Si Tenang in 1999, no less than 12 dugong carcasses had been found in Johor waters till 2004. On Friday, a male dugong, weighing about 300kg, was found floating in the waters off a village in Tanjung Langsat about 5pm.

On Tuesday, a dead dugong, also weighing 300kg, was found floating near the Sungai Pok Besar jetty in Gelang Patah. A Fisheries Department spokesman said the waters off Johor were abundant with benthic seagrass, which was the main diet of the dugongs. The dugongs' migratory path stretches from Sungai Johor, along the coastline eastwards and cuts across to the inland shore of Pulau Sibul, where rich meadows of seagrass are found.

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

Dugongs, unlikely sirens of the sea (Sydney, Australia)

29 March 2009, *Sydney Morning Herald*

They're blubbery, whiskery, rotund and about as far removed from the lissom, nubile image of mermaids as you could get. But that's exactly what dugongs were once mistaken for, according to folklore. Dugongs, marine mammals from the order sirenia, are said to have once lured female-starved sailors, giving rise to the mermaid myth.

"It's been passed down through folklore," explains Stacy Ong, an aquarist at the Sydney Aquarium where dugongs have been on display in the Mermaid Lagoon exhibit since December. "From above, the curves of a dugong apparently looked like a woman to sailors."

Despite their curvaceous form, the dugongs' primary diet is seagrass, Ong says. It takes up to a week to digest a meal but a mature dugong can still weigh in at a hefty 400-500 kilograms.

Full story and source: <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/dugongs-unlikely-sirens-of-the-sea-20090326-9bdz.html>

Marine sanctuary to be expanded (United Arab Emirates)

26 March 2009, *The National - Abu Dhabi*

A marine sanctuary that is home to several endangered species is to become six times its current size, a government official has revealed. The Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi plans to increase Al Yasat Marine Protected Area from 482 square kilometres to about 3,000 by bringing a fifth island within its boundaries, said Dr Thabit Zahran al Abdessalaam, the director of marine biodiversity management.

The four islands that currently make up the sanctuary – Upper Yasat, Lower Yasat, Esam and Karsha – are surrounded by coral reefs, which provide habitat for over-exploited fish species such as the orange-spotted grouper, better known as hammour. The area's seagrass beds provide foraging grounds for endangered hawksbill turtles and dugongs, marine mammals which are two to three metres in length and weigh up to 400kg.

The protected area, where no fishing, killing of animals or development is allowed, will now include the island of Muhayimat, around which large seagrass beds exist. Once the decision is given final approval, Al Yasat will be almost equal in size to the Marawah Marine Biosphere Reserve, which, with a territory of more than 4,000 square kilometres, is the largest in the UAE.

Full story and source: <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090326/NATIONAL/679204911/1138>

Port Geographe handballing (Western Australia, Australia)

23 March 2009, *Busselton Dunsborough Mail*

Everyone affected by the problem of hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) at Port Geographe wants it resolved as soon as possible. Many of the stakeholders have made a commitment to make that happen, although they are not all in agreement about exactly what needs to be done.

A deed between the State Government, the Shire of Busselton and the developer sets out requirements for the management of the coast at Port Geographe and this deed was rewritten last year to include the new developer. A DPI spokesperson told the Mail that (according to the deed), "The DPI has responsibility for monitoring the movement of sand to prevent beach widening or erosion. The Shire (of Busselton) has responsibility for setting the standards relating to seagrass wrack on the beach and the developer is responsible for managing sand movement and the wrack, including any potential side effects such as H₂S or noise".

The infrastructure department is managing a study, being undertaken by the University of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University, to investigate the decomposition of seagrass and the generation and release of gases such as hydrogen sulfide. The study will use a computer program, to predict seagrass movement and model proposed changes to the entrance groynes, and will be completed in February 2010.

Full story and source: <http://busselton.yourguide.com.au/news/local/news/general/port-geographe-handballing/1469390.aspx?storypage=0>

New protections now in place for great white sharks, other marine life (San Rafael, CA, USA)

24 March 2009, Marin Independent-Journal

Great white sharks, seagrass in Tomales Bay and other parts of the aquatic environment off Marin's coast will enjoy more protection under new federal rules that took effect this month. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which oversees federal marine sanctuaries, developed the regulatory changes after years of study, planning and public comment.

Tomales Bay's seagrass, which helps species such as herring, will get special protection. Seven buoys will be placed in the bay to protect eelgrass and other seagrasses so boaters do not drop anchor or moor over the areas, which can damage the grasses or prevent them from getting sun. The grasses help trap sediment, reduce nutrients and pollutants in the water and improve water quality. Seagrass also provides important habitat for migratory birds, such as shorebirds. The seagrass grows along the perimeter of parts of the bay, usually in shallow waters up to 10 feet deep.

Full story and source: http://www.marinij.com/marinnews/ci_11987915

Save the dugong (Thailand)

23 March 2009, The National

Trang's fishermen have asked the government to strictly control the illegal dugong trade after they found many foreign mariners hunting the animals and smuggling them out to Singapore for Bt50,000 each, villager leader IsmaAnn Ben SaArd said. The illegal hunt is being carried out by foreign fishermen especially from Satun province. They throw bombs into cairns or near coral reefs, with the resulting explosion throwing up many fish, he added.

Moreover, they also use seine and large fishing nets to hunt stingray and other kinds of fish two kilometers from the coast. They use a local fishhook called "Rawai" to hunt dugong, killing more than 25 of the creatures during the past month alone. Trang authorities have announced that Rawai is an illegal piece of fishing equipment for it endangers dugong and sea turtles.

He said each dugong commands a price of Bt50,000 on the black market, with its bones and teeth going for Bt30,000. Singapore is the biggest market for this trade. The country uses the dead dugong to produce medicine and amulets.

Full story and source: http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2009/03/23/national/national_30098530.php

SEAGRASS-WATCH NEWS Issue 36

The latest issue of Seagrass-Watch news is now available online at <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/newsletters.html>

2009 is off to a successful start, with some enthusiastic groups even sampling at night. The New Year also kicked off with several training workshops to build the capacity of volunteers and Land & Sea Rangers from Torres Strait and Cape York Peninsula.

In this issue you can read about the role our productive seagrass meadows play in sequestering carbon and how stewardship activities can offset our carbon footprints.

Read how seagrass is attracting tourists in Broome (Western Australia), but how groups are campaigning against the eradication of seagrass at tourist resorts in the Maldives.

There is also an article on a survey examining seagrass condition from the uplifting of Nias island (Indonesia) after the earthquakes and tsunamis in 2004 and 2005.

In this issue you'll also find articles on the SeaSearch program monitoring *Posidonia australis* in Victoria and how students in Fiji spent their Valentine's Day.

You'll also find our regular updates from groups in Singapore, Torres Strait, Townsville and the Great Sandy Strait.

You can even learn about the charismatic sawfish, which shares coasts and estuaries with our seagrasses.

CONFERENCES

Queensland Coastal Conference 2009: Waves of Change (Gold Coast 12-15 May, 2009)

Registration for the Queensland Coastal Conference 2009 "Waves of Change" has now opened. The Queensland Coastal Conference 2009 is not just about learning of new developments in natural resource management, but will be a balanced discussion of practical, on-ground coastal management and the policies and programs that inform coastal zone management in Queensland.

To register: <http://www.iceaustralia.com/qldcoast09/register.html>

More information: <http://www.iceaustralia.com/qldcoast09/index.html>

SEAGRASS-WATCH WORKSHOPS 2009

Asia

Singapore, May 02 -03 (*Registration closes 20th April 2009*)

For more information and registration: <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/training.html#wrkshop09>

Bali, May 09-10 (*Registration closes 20th April 2009*)

For more information and registration: <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/training.html#wrkshop09>

SEAGRASS-WATCH FIELD DAYS 2009

Australia

Whitsunday, QLD: April 5, 2009 (RSVP by 04 April 2009)

For more information and registration: http://www.seagrasswatch.org/extension.html#PI_Ap09

GALLERY

Cooktown (Qld, Australia) : 26-28 March 2009 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Seagrass-Watch HQ conducted a two day (Level 1) workshop in Cooktown (26-27 March) at the River of Gold Motel. The workshop was attended by local QPW/EPA officers, Indigenous rangers and local community.

Gladstone (Qld, Australia) : 26-28 March 2009 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Some serious mud was encountered at Rodds Bay as predicted, and seagrass proved hard to find. It had disappeared from RD1 and was present in very limited amounts at RD2. There were plenty of *Z. capricorni* rhizomes present under the surface, indicating this could be a seasonal issue or possibly related to recent high levels of freshwater?

FROM HQ

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

Seagrass-Watch News Issue 35 <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 E- Bulletin is compiled by Len McKenzie & Rudi Yoshida.