SEAGRASS-WATCH E-BULLETIN
31 January 2008

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NEWS

World Wetlands Day Saturday 2 February 2008

World Wetlands Day marks the date of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands on 2nd February 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar. World Wetlands Day was first celebrated in 1997. Since then government agencies, non-government organisations and community groups have celebrated World Wetlands Day by undertaking actions to raise public awareness of wetland values and benefits and promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands. These activities include seminars, nature walks, festivals, launches of new policies, announcement of new Ramsar sites, newspaper articles, radio interviews and wetland rehabilitation.

The international theme for World Wetlands Day 2008 is Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People. This is in recognition of the importance of the impacts of wetland-related diseases and poor sanitation on the quality of water and wetlands.
more……. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html.

ISBW8 - call for abstracts is now open

A call for abstracts is now open for the International Seagrass Biology Workshop 8 (ISBW8), Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre, Vancouver Island (Canada), 1-5 September 2008. All those interested in attending should submit an abstract before 3rd April 2008 through the online abstract submission form http://isbw.seagrassonline.org/abstract.html

Places to attend the International Seagrass Biology Workshop in Canada will be limited due to venue size. So all those considering attending should complete the abstract submission form as soon as possible.

ISBW8 participants are encouraged to present some aspect of their work on seagrasses in the broadest possible context from research, technical developments, management priorities, consultancy experience or community participation: past, present or future. Session themes will be identified by the program committee after considering all the abstracts. The proposed program can be viewed at http://isbw.seagrassonline.org/program_proposal.html
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html.

Dugongs hit the food trail (Cairns, Australia)

24 January 2008, The Cairns Post, p. 18

Dugongs will be on the move across the Far North and could travel hundreds of kilometres because of the heavy wet season's effect on seagrass, an award-winning researcher has predicted.

James Cook University's Helene Marsh said seagrass dieback was highly likely within six months because of the "big wet", and a dugong population of about 9000 between Cardwell and Cape York would be on the prowl for food.
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html.

U.S. military must consider Japan base's impact on marine mammal (San Diego, USA)

24 January 2008, San Diego Union Tribune

SAN FRANCISCO – A federal judge ordered the U.S. Department of Defense on Thursday to consider the impact of a proposed military base in Japan on an endangered marine mammal revered in Japanese culture.

U.S. District Judge Marilyn Hall Patel ruled that the U.S. military violated federal law when it failed to evaluate the air station's potential effects on the Okinawa dugong, a 1,000 pound marine mammal related to the manatee and the extinct Steller's sea cow. The judge sided with American and Japanese environmentalists who argued plans to relocate the Futenma Air Station to a site off the northeast coast of Okinawa would threaten the dwindling number of dugong that live in the seagrass beds around the island.

The new base, which is scheduled to be completed in 2014, is part of a broader arrangement between the U.S. and Japan that would lead to a reduced military presence on Okinawa, home to about half of the 50,000 American troops in Japan. Many Okinawa residents and environmentalists oppose the planned relocation, which involves using landfill to build runways they say would destroy fragile dugong habitat in Henoko Bay. They say the project would also increase noise and water pollution and threaten sea turtles, birds and mangrove trees.
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html.

Seagrass rich in life (Australia)

18 January 2007, Article by Philip Hammond, Courier Mail

An abundance of marine life in the Gold Coast Broadwater's seagrass beds could be threatened by a boat channel deepening operation. Transport Minister John Mickel yesterday announced that dredging had started last weekend to deepen a channel north of Wavebreak Island to a depth of 3.5m. It involves removal of 12,500 cubic metres of sand. But in an area seldom visited by divers, east of the island, a 170m-long patch of healthy seagrass hosts a huge variety of marine life.

Southport-based commercial diver Ian Banks's volunteer work with Seagrass-Watch has revealed a new dimension to the area's marine fauna. His photos testify to an "amazing amount of life" relying on seagrass beds.

See Ian Banks's impressive collection of Photographs and videos at www.divingthegoldcoast.com.au
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html.

DEP Raises More Red Flags About Dredging (Tampa,FL,USA)

26 January 2008, By CHRISTIAN M. WADETampa Tribune

PORT RICHEY - State regulators have presented city officials with another laundry list of concerns about plans to dredge a waterway linking Lake Deedra to the Pithlachascotee River, one of three permit requests for a multimillion-dollar project.

All of the agencies involved in the permitting process - the DEP, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, National Marine Fisheries Service, Army Corps of Engineers and the federal Environmental Protection Agency - oppose that permit.

The consultants also have asked regulators to divide a third permit request, to dredge 26 canals, into two parts: one dealing with dredging five canals where the seagrass beds will be disturbed; and another covering canals where seagrass is nonexistent.
Full story and source: http://www2.tbo.com/content/2008/jan/26/pa-dep-raises-more-red-flags-about-dredging/

Shire, developers to meet over Port Geographe seaweed (Australia)

24 January 2008, ABC Regional Online

The Shire of Busselton is planning to meet Port Geographe developers ahead of next week's council meeting, to address the issue of seaweed building up at Port Geographe in south-west Western Australia. A group of electors wants the council to monitor toxic hydrogen sulfide gases emitted by rotting seaweed. It also wants council to look at modifying the local groynes and get the developer to pay the costs.

A shire report says the developers should pay half the cost of a employing an engineer to handle seagrass matters and for the developer to implement an odour monitoring program. Shire president Wes Hartley says the developers are willing to help meet the costs of resolving the seagrass issue.
Full story and source: http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/01/24/2145435.htm?site=southwestwa

Seagrass areas to be protected (Sydney,NSW,Australia)

22 January 2008, By Murray TrembathSt George & Sutherland Shire Leader

Seagrass areas in Botany Bay, which were decimated by sea-urchins in the early 1980s, are reported to be growing with abundance. EnergyAustralia, which commissioned the report, said special measures would minimise the impact on revegetation during construction of a new seven-kilometre electricity cable between Kurnell and Matraville.

Planning Department director general Sam Haddad approved the $110 million million project in December. Construction is expected to start in the first half of this year and take about 18 months to complete. The submarine cable will be buried in a 1.2 metre-wide trench, but where it traverses the seagrass beds off Silver Beach, Kurnell, the cable will be in two narrow trenches, each 400 millimetres-wide each.
Full story and source: http://stgeorge.yourguide.com.au/news/local/general/seagrass-areas-to-be-protected/1166902.html

New call to reveal safeguards (Melbourne,Victoria,Australia)

19 January 2008, By Clay Lucas, The Age -

One of Victoria's most respected marine scientists has called for the public release of a final plan to manage the environmental consequences of the $1 billion channel deepening. Melbourne University's Professor Michael Keough, a key adviser to the State Government on channel deepening, said: "As a matter of principle, that plan should be public.

The Port of Melbourne has consistently blocked access to the plan, saying only that it would be released before the project began on February 1. The authority only yesterday provided final details to federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett. Mr Garrett approved the project late last year, subject to a satisfactory environmental management plan. A spokeswoman for Mr Garrett said the minister was still not satisfied with the plan. He has demanded more information.

The environmental management plan details how water quality, noise and other issues such as seagrass, fish populations and penguins will be monitored during dredging.
Full story and source: http://www.theage.com.au/news/climate-watch/new-call-to-reveal-safeguards/2008/01/18/1200620212119.html

Bay health depends on splendor of the grass (St. Petersburg,FL,USA)

18 January 2008, By F. TIMOTHY MARTIN, St. Petersburg Times -

Which came first, the sandbar or the seagrass? It sounds like a bad joke, but some area scientists are hoping the answer will help restore 30,000 acres of seagrasses that disappeared from Tampa Bay between the 1950s and 1980s, when heavy pollution in the bay made water quality unpalatable to the life-sustaining grasses.

The Tampa Bay Estuary Program recently announced that it received $560,000 from a mix of local and national environmental funds to rehabilitate the bay. The money will be used to coordinate the Longshore Sand Bar project, a plan that has scientists both building sandbars to encourage seagrass and planting new seagrass beds so that sandbars might naturally develop to attract even more seagrass.
Full story and source: http://www.sptimes.com/2008/01/18/Brandontimes/Bay_health_depends_on.shtml

Scientists: environmental protection, development not always at odds (Washington,DC,USA)

17 January 2008, EurekAlert (press release)

GAINESVILLE, Fla. --- Mangroves in coastal Thailand are the main protection against deadly flooding from tsunamis, so it might seem wise to protect them at all costs. However, ripping out a few mangroves and replacing them with shrimp farms, an important local industry, doesn’t necessarily have to reduce the plants’ power to blunt tsunamis. And in that observation lies a fresh, quantitative approach to how policy makers can protect the environment and allow growth and development that improve local residents’ lives. So says a University of Florida zoologist and co-author of a paper on the topic set to appear this week in the journal Science.

Brian Silliman, a UF assistant professor of zoology, said governments and managers worldwide are leaning toward a system known as “ecosystem-based management” to achieve environmental protection goals. Contrasting traditional techniques that focus on single species, ecosystem-based management seeks to conserve not only species but also habitats and the services they provide to humans by conserving entire ecosystems.

Silliman said that managers might make a common assumption: The amount of benefits from a natural amenity – whether se grass, forests or mangroves – are linked directly to its size. So, more mangroves would mean proportionally more storm surge protection, more habitat for juvenile fish and more pollution-filtering capacity. That assumption inevitably leads to either-or conclusions about environmental protection and development, Silliman said. If more mangroves always means more environmental benefits, then none should be destroyed. The main point of the Science paper is that assumption and its inevitable conclusion are not always right and should be questioned.
Full story and source: http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2008-01/uof-sep011408.php

Ecosystem Based Management Not Enough to Reverse Coastal Habitat (USA)

16 January 2008, Newswise (press release)

Worldwide coastal ecosystems and habitats will continue to decline unless economists and ecologists work together to improve current methods to assess coastal ecosystem benefits, according to an article today in the global scientific journal, Science. Edward B. Barbier, the John S. Bugas Professor of Economics at the University of Wyoming, says ecosystem-based management (EBM) is a way to reconcile the decline in vital coastal ecosystem services with continuing human development pressures. Barbier and his colleagues endorse the general need for coastal EBM, but their research indicates that strategy is “likely to fail” unless others, such as economists and ecologists, work together.

To illustrate the importance of this dilemma, Barbier and his team focus on the key ecosystem service of coastal wetlands acting as “natural barriers” to the economic damages caused by frequent coastal storm events. In recent years, this critical “storm prevention” service of coastal habits -- such as mangroves and marshlands -- has received considerable attention caused through massive damages. Those were inflicted by the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the August 2005 Hurricane Katrina along the Gulf Coast and the November 2007 Cyclone Sidr in coastal Bangladesh.

From field studies of mangroves, salt marshes, seagrass beds, near shore coral reefs, and sand dunes, the study shows that the ability of these critical habitat to “attenuate” or break up, incoming storm surges and waves declines considerably as more habitat is lost. “We show that by valuing correctly this ‘natural barrier’ service, the best land use is neither complete conversion of the mangroves to an alternative use, such as commercial shrimp aquaculture, nor preservation of all the mangrove forest,” he says. “Instead, the best coastal management policy is a mix of these development and conservation options. In fact, the outcome from our Thailand mangrove valuation example corresponds to ‘best practice’ guidelines for mangrove management in Asia, which recommend that ideal mangrove-pond ratios should not exceed 20 percent of the habitat area converted to ponds.”
Full story and source: http://www.newswise.com/articles/view/536917/
Full story and source: http://environmentalresearchweb.org/cws/article/research/32492

GALLERY

Sentosa (Singapore): 24 January 2008 http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html

A cool evening over Sentosa and you can see the seagrasses and marinelife on this marvellous natural shore. This natural shore outside the sea wall has lots of Enhalus acoroides and Halophila ovalis. The tide was not very low but the team worked fast in the fading light. Robin found a tiny flatworm! These worms are really flat and sometimes mistaken for nudibranchs. *Text: Team Seagrass-Singapore*.

Townsville Region (QLD, Australia): 20 - 23 January 2008 http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html

Midnight sampling was the order of the "day" for the start of 2008 monitoring in the Townsville region. Sites from Shelly Beach to Magnetic Island were all sampled over the 3 nights.
Shelly Beach: 20 January 2008
Bushland Beach: 21 January 2008
Cockle Bay, Magnetic Is: 22 January 2008
Picnic Bay, Magnetic Is: 23 January 2008

Far North Queensland (Australia): 20 - 21 January 2008 http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html

Yule Point:: 20 January 2008
Seagrass-Watch monitoring for 2008 in the Far North got off to a HOT start: air temperature was 35°C and water temperature was 38°C. Nevertheless, the seagrass meadows of Yule Point have never looked better. The mean seagrass cover was the highest ever recorded at both sites since monitoring began in 2000. The canopy heights were also seasonally high, providing good food and

shelter. Dugong feeding trails were abundant and lots of juvenile penaeid prawns were observed sheltering within the seagrass canopy.

Green Island: 21 January 2008

The HOT conditions continued, although the offshore sea breeze provided significant relief. Like the coastal seagrass meadows at Yule Point, the offshore seagrass meadows at Green Island were also seasonally high. Unfortunately, still no seeds were to be found.

Chek Jawa (Singapore): 20 January 2008 *http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html*

The Team was back in booties and on the shores this hot HOT afternoon. We had quite a lot of first timers aka Green Grassers, so Siti did a quick quiz on "Is this Seagrass?" *Text: Team Seagrass-Singapore*.

FROM HQ

Seagrass-Watch News Issue 31 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

- Seagrasses of Australia
- Phytoplankton Guide
- Seagrass Biology (Volume 2 only)
- Bookmarks
- Stickers
- Seagrass-Watch Newsletter 31 (hardcopy)
- Seagrass-Watch Newsletter 30 (hardcopy)
- Seagrass-Watch Newsletter 29 (hardcopy)
- Seagrass-Watch Newsletter 28 (hardcopy)

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.