31 December 2013

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NEWS

Judge dredge: Greens say dump site a disaster (QLD, Australia)

12 December 2013, by John McCarthy, Courier Mail, page 22.

More than 10 years of studies on Abbot Point have found a virtual dead zone in the World Heritage area with little life or environmental value, thus suitable for the dumping of 3 million cubic metres of dredge material. According to environmental studies for the project, the area that will be used to dump clay and sand-based spoil has no-high fisheries, no significant environmental value, is remote from breeding areas, is 40km from coral reefs, is in depths of 40 metres and will retain the sediment without plumes. It is also well away from shipping lanes.

But a leading scientist claims the dredging approval for the three Abbott Point coal terminals will be "another nail in the coffin" for the Great Barrier Reef because of the massive amount of sediment smothering seagrass and coral. Environmentalists liken it to the load that could be carried by 150,000 dump trucks. Tourist operators are also angered by the decision, claiming it will have significant impacts on the bays and reefs of the Whitsundays with build-up of spoil from previous dredging already showing up in what should be pristine areas. James Cook University research scientists Jon Brodie said he could not understand just why the 3 million cubic metres of dredge spoil was not being dumped on land in a way that the Federal Government ordered at a similar project in Gladstone.

www.seagrasswatch.org
His claims have been rejected by the North Queensland Bulk Ports Corporation which said that option would have caused even greater environmental problems with the possibility of acid sulfate leaching from a land-based dump into surrounding land and water. NQBP also said it could not guarantee there would be no impacts on the reef from the dredging but was confident that the more than 10 years of studies they had put into the scheme showed impacts would be minimal. A spokes-woman said there would be no plume from the dumping of the spoil at a proposed site 40kms from the nearest coral reef, a claim Mr Brodie said was "rubbish". The planned dump site will be 3km from the World War II Catalina Wreck site, but a final site will be decided when the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority issues a permit next week. The site is not considered environmentally notable, according to NQBP.

About $90 million will be put into offsets over several decades and the Government has demanded major improvements in sediment levels and a 150 per cent improvement in water quality. Mr Brodie, a senior principal officer with the Australian Centre for Tropical Freshwater Research at James Cook University, said there was no way the offsets ordered by the Federal Government would come anywhere near the damage being done by the dredging. He said the three issues affecting the Great Barrier Reef were climate change, dredging and farm sediment, and offsets ordered by the Federal Government were more likely to put pressure on farmers rather than the port developers.

Whitsunday-based tourism operator Alan Gundy said the industry was "gutted" by the Abbot Point decision. He said the Federal and State governments recently spent $250m to save 360,000 tonnes of sediment from the reef so the $90m for offset would not go far.

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

**Abbott Government gives green light to Abbot Point (QLD, Australia)**

11 December 2013, by Daniel Bateman, Townsville Bulletin

All systems go for Abbot Point expansion. Bowen is celebrating after long-awaited approval for the world's largest coal port at Abbot Point was finally handed down by Environment Minister Greg Hunt late yesterday afternoon. Three years after the original approval deadline was set, the Minister has given the green light to the controversial dredging program for the multi-billion dollar port expansion. Mr Hunt has also approved construction of the Adani-owned terminal 0, a coal export facility which includes a 2.75km outloading jetty and conveyor, new wharves, ship loaders and berths for two capsize vessels.

Proponents say the first phase of construction of the project will see at least 300 jobs and the indirect employment of 430 people, providing a desperately needed boost to Bowen's economy. But Green groups say the development, which will see up to three million cubic metres of spoil dumped offshore within the Great Barrier Reef marine park, will severely impact the reef, particularly the tourism hotspot of the Whitsundays.

The minister has placed 95 environmental conditions on the port expansion, including some of the strictest conditions ever made in Australian history. This includes measures for the protection of endangered marine species such as dugongs and sea turtles and their habitat, and measures to monitor water quality whenever dredging occurs. Mr Hunt said the decisions took into account the latest and best science and management practices.

Conservationists have labelled the decision a massive assault on the environment, which would place the future of the Great Barrier Reef in jeopardy. Abbot Point Action Group spokeswoman Maria Macdonald said the environmental conditions placed on the development were not strict enough. The proponent is allowed to dispose of 1.3 million cubic metres of dredge spoil a year, which can only be removed between March and June. The Minister, however, can still grant an increase in volume and extensions to the dredging period.

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


related articles:


http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/dec/10/greg-hunt-approves-dredging-off-queensland-to-create-huge-coalport

www.seagrasswatch.org
Two senior engineers have told exactly how the controversial bund wall in Gladstone Harbour leaked in 2011 and 2012, letting dirty dredge spoil flow out to the Great Barrier Reef. A protective geotextile cloth that was originally supposed to be built inside the porous bund wall, was instead laid on the inside wall of the bund wall. It was half the thickness of the originally-designed geotextile cloth and simply tore, crumpled and "ballooned away" from the bund wall as the tide rose and fell in 2011 and 2012. This left large holes in the bund wall for the dredge spoil to leak through on the rising tide in Gladstone's Harbour.

Gladstone Harbour's bund wall was built in 2011 because 25 million tonnes of sediment had to be dredged to make way for the harbour expansion for the liquid natural gas industry. The wall was needed to protect marine fauna (largely fish and turtles) and flora (largely seagrass). Bill Service and Warren Hornsey, say the leaking was caused by problems with the lining - which was thinner than originally proposed - and not being placed within the bund wall.

The bund wall was built by Abigroup, confirmed by this site as part of Gladstone Harbour's Western Dredging Project. A spokeswoman for Abigroup said they met its contract requirements for the project. The Queensland Government said Abigroup was not fined by the previous state government, or the existing state government for the leaks. A Gladstone Port Corporation spokeswoman said she was unable to comment on why the original bund wall design was changed, or whether Abigroup was ever fined for the dredge spoil leaks.

Researchers develop new cement mortar from seagrass residues (Spain)
24 December 2013, By PressRelease, Science

Researchers of the University of Alicante have developed a new process for manufacturing concrete to achieve greater resistance. This is a new mortar based on Portland cement with the addition of the ashes retrieved from Neptune Grass residues. This new mix, developed and patented by the Research Group in Materials Technology and Urban Planning, enables improved mechanical properties, such as increased initial resistance, and solve an environmental problem valuing the seagrass residues.

“Currently, the addition of the ash used is fly ash. The characteristics of each fly ash in particular affect the resistance of mortar or concrete at a given age and the evolution of the same, producing a delay in initial resistance. However, if the mortar or concrete is kept wet, its pozzolanic activity contributes to increase resistance at later ages, offering even more resistance than the mortar or concrete without fly ash”, lecturer José Miguel Saval Perez from the Department Construction Engineering, Public Works and Urban Infrastructure at the University of Alicante explains. “In the case of using ashes from the calcination of Neptune Grass residues, the opposite effect is produced, resulting in an increase of the initial resistance of the mortars added”, José Miguel Saval states.

The group has designed this new mortar and worked with it so that they highlight, among other characteristics, its fluorescence, behavior and compressive resistance for different ratios of seagrass in the mortar.

Indigenous rangers protecting turtles (QLD, Australia)
24 December 2013, by Miriam Hall, ABC Rural

There is little known about the flat back turtles that nest on the beaches of north Queensland, or the threats they face. But a group of indigenous rangers is working to protect the creatures by patrolling the beaches and the ocean.

Mixing traditional knowledge and modern science, the rangers are making sure the extraordinary species will survive into the future, and be around for the next generation. The rangers are fitting the turtles with GPS trackers to get a better understanding of where they go, and how they live.

Traditional owner Jim Gaston says protecting the turtles is culturally important the local indigenous communities. “Our people looked after them for the last 40,000 years, that was our tucker.” “That’s why we look after them so the next generation, they may not be able to eat them, but at least they can still see and touch.”

Boaties urged to slow down in bay (QLD, Australia)
23 December 2013, The Gympie Times

Boat owners have been urged to slow down to help preserve marine wildlife in the Great Sandy Marine Park and Tin Can Bay this Christmas. Peter Wright, Wide Bay Area manager for the Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing, said turtles and dugong in particular were at risk from increased boating traffic during holiday periods. "Turtles and dugong come to the water's surface to breathe and are sometimes killed or injured by speeding vessels when they come up for air," Mr Wright said. "Unfortunately, boat strike is a very common cause of death for turtle and dugong. "Go Slow areas in turtle and dugong habitat protect these remarkable animals.

"Skippers travelling through Go Slow areas are not allowed to operate their vessels on the plane, or in a manner that could result in a turtle or dugong strike. "QPWS patrols focus on the Go Slow areas and boaties caught doing the wrong thing can be issued with an on-the-spot $440 fine," Mr Wright said.

Boaties can download a Great Sandy Marine Park Boaties Quick Guide from http://www.nprs.rqd.gov.au/parks/greetsandy-marine/marine-park-zones.html for more information on the Great Sandy Marine Park zones. "The important message is to slow down and give the turtles and dugong a chance to get out of the way," Mr Wright said. Anyone who comes across injured, stranded or dead marine wildlife these holidays should report it by calling 1300 ANIMAL (1300 264 625).

Wildlife bureau to probe dugong’s death on seaweed farm (Philippines)
20 December 2013, Inquirer.net

Wildlife officials are to investigate the death of a dugong found trapped on a seaweed farm in Busuanga, Palawan early this month. The Biodiversity Management Bureau (formerly known as the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources said it would send a technical team next week to determine the circumstances around the death of the protected marine mammal.

In a statement Friday, the bureau’s director Theresa Mundita Lim called on the public to report immediately to the nearest local office of the DENR any sighting of stranded dugong or any other marine wildlife in need of rescuing. A report from the non-governmental organization Community Centered Conservation (C3) Philippines indicated that the 2.6-meter male dugong was found dead, entangled in a rope in waters about seven meters deep in the seaweed farm on Dec. 6.

She said her bureau will be coordinating with the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development to determine what measures need to be taken to prevent such incidents. The measures will include the development of early warning systems and protocols on the rescue and release of dugong and other marine animals trapped in fish cages and seaweed farms.

Reef authority delays dredging decision (QLD, Australia)
20 December 2103, AAP, Herald Sun

 Authorities have delayed a controversial decision on whether to allow the dumping of dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) was due to make a decision to
grant permits for the developers of the Abbot Point coal port terminal to dump dredge spoil on Friday. But the authority on Friday announced that the decision will be delayed until January 31.

Green groups have tentatively welcomed the news, but say the fight to stop the dumping isn’t over. WWF spokesman Richard Leck said GBRMPA needs to listen to the science, tourist operators, fishers and concerned community members and put the needs of the reef first.

Australian Marine Conservation Society spokeswoman Felicity Wishart said the authority was right to extend the deadline. "The high risk posed by dumping dredge spoil in the reef's waters and uncertainty over the full extent of damage left GBRMPA little choice but to reject the issuing of a permit," she said in a statement. "An overwhelming majority of Australians want to see dumping of dredge spoil completely banned in the World Heritage waters of the reef."


related articles:
https://www.dredgingtoday.com/2013/12/20/authority-delays-great-barrier-reef-dredging-decision-australia/

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Heavy fishing boat a major risk to Dugong in Kutch (India)
16 December 2013, by Himanshu Kaushik, The Times of India

The study 'Dugong distribution, habitat and risks due to fisheries and other anthropogenic activities in India', by the Wildlife Institute of India, pointed out that in the Gulf of Kutch, more than 50% of boats used were in heavy fishing boat category. This was a major threat as heavy boats cause excessive damage to seagrass beds. Also, some fishermen said excessive hunting in the past was responsible for the decline of the dugong in the Gulf of Kutch.

Gill nets are most dangerous and if a dugongs die when accidentally caught in them. Catches in gill nets are one of the major causes of dugong mortality. Gill nets alone form 63% of the total gear used, followed by purse seine (35%), beach seine (1%) and long lines (1%). Usage of gill nets was highest in Kutch and the Mannar-Palk Bay area. In the Gulf of Kutch over 65% of fishermen use gill nets. According to the study, a high proportion of respondents left gill nets untended for over 2-3 hours, effectively reducing the possibility of an entangled dugong being spotted and released in time.

Although hunting has been totally banned in India, dugong meat is highly prized and considered a delicacy. Its consumption has been reported in the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay and Andaman and Nicobar islands. In the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay, gill nets, shore seine, trawl nets, drift nets, ray nets and explosives were used to hunt dugongs. Capture numbers were 25 dugongs per year in 1960-1980 and 200 dugongs per year in 1983-1984. This dropped to 9 dugongs per year in 1986-1988. Also, 19% of respondents said that they would eat or sell dugong meat if caught in their net.

Unintentional dugong mortality is caused by boat strikes and propeller injuries when motorized boats traverse shallow feeding grounds. Fast-moving boats give dugongs; less time to evade a collision. With 3.5% of daytime spent resting at the surface of the water, dugongs are vulnerable to boat strikes. Compared to solitary individuals, mother-calf pairs spend more time near the surface, and are hence more prone to accidents. Another threat to dugong habitat is trawl, which degrades seagrass meadows by uprooting rhizomes and removing healthy leaves.


related articles:
http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-12-16/ahmedabad/45254907_1_dugong-seagrass-mortality

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Poona group comes to the rescue of a stranded dugong (QLD, Australia)
14 December 2013, by Hannah Busch, Fraser Coast Chronicle

When he first saw a big grey mass on a Poona beach, tourist Lee Harold thought it was just an unusual rock. It turned out to be a stranded dugong, caught on the sands as the tide went out and in danger of dying. The dugong, found last Sunday, is among a breed that is still recovering from a lack of food and is at a high risk of being struck by boat propellers because of their need to come to the surface. Mr Harold was among a large group of tourists and Poona residents who helped the dugong, including Poona resident Colin Jones who held its head out of the water.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife rangers, unable to get to the location, issued instructions by phone. Senior ranger Alan Dyball said the first response from people who find a stranded animal should be to call the RSPCA 1300 264 625 hotline, as the Poona group had done. Mr Dyball said turtles which were out of harm's way could often be left to rest and return to the water on their own.

Dugong meat seized (India)
11 December 2013, Ramanathapuram, Press Trust of India

About 150 kg of Dugong meat was today seized near Keelakarai and one person arrested in this connection. During a vehicle-check, forest officials found the meat in processed form being transported in an autorickshaw. It was worth about Rs. 15 lakh in the international market, officials said.

Aswar Ali of Periyapattinam was arrested for allegedly smuggling the meat and the autorickshaw seized. The dugong (Dugong dugon) is a large marine mammal and the country’s endangered ‘mermaids’. It is also known as seacow.

GALLERY

Nago Is, Kavieng (Papua New Guinea): 29 November - 1 December 2013
http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html

CONFERENCES

The 11th International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW11) (China, 7-10 November 2014)
Declining seagrasses in a changing world.

The International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW) gives a good chance for the scientists working on various aspects of seagrass ecosystems to come together and discuss their latest achievements. The ISBW11 will be held from 7-10 November 2014 at Sanya city, Hainan Province, China, organized by South China Sea Institute of Oceanology, Chinese Academy of Sciences. ISBW11 convenor is Dr Xiaoping Haung.

The following symposia themes were chosen for ISBW11:
1) Key Ecological Processes;
2) Ecosystem Vulnerability and Resilience;
3) Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services;
4) Management and Restoration.

Important dates:
22 March 2014 - Opening of registration on the web site
30 May 2014 - Opening of online payment
30 May 2014 - Beginning of hotel reservation
10 August 2014 - The last day of abstract submission
01 September 2014 - End of early bird payment
25 September 2014 - Notification of abstract acceptance
15 October 2014 - End of online payment
25 October 2014 - Notification of final list of participants to the ISBW11
07 November 2014 - ISBW11 begins

for more information, visit http://isbw11.csp.escience.cn/dct/page/1

SEAGRASS-WATCH on YouTube
Presentation on what seagrasses are and why they are important (over 31,503 views to date)

...seagrass matters blog
World Seagrass Association blog http://wsa.seagrassonline.org/blog/
Keep up to date on what’s happening around the world from the WSA with regular updates from WSA President Dr Giuseppe Di Carlo and notes from the field by Siti Yaakub.