

# Chapter 3

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## How to Start

### 3.1. Contact the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator

Once an interest in Seagrass-Watch monitoring has been identified, it is recommended to contact the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator ([seagrass@dpi.qld.gov.au](mailto:seagrass@dpi.qld.gov.au)) as a first step. The Seagrass-Watch Coordinator is a government funded position to manage/validate/interpret the data, coordinate between communities and scientists, establish networks and to develop the program state/nation-wide.

The Coordinator will be able to provide background information on the program and establish contact with other Seagrass-Watch groups that may be in or near your region.

To assist with engaging other volunteers from the community, extension material is available from the Coordinator. This material includes:

- A brief introduction to seagrass and the importance of seagrass
- An overview of Seagrass-Watch monitoring program.
- A video and manual of sampling techniques
- Copies of Seagrass-Watch Newsletters and reports

If you represent a recognised environment group within Queensland, the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator may be able to visit and give a presentation/workshop.

### 3.2. Engaging the community

The definition of community in this context is *"an association of people living in a given area or sharing some general commonality in addition to geographic proximity"*.

One of the long-term objectives of the monitoring program is to involve local communities who live near seagrass meadows. The local community includes all local stakeholders, so it is important to involve the broader community involved from the start of the program.

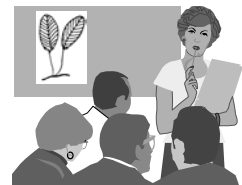
### 3.2.1. Suggested Steps to Initiating Community Involvement

Find out if there are any existing community groups in the area who deal with coastal issues, e.g., local fisher organisations, local environment clubs, etc. Be sensitive to the local politics and culture of the people in the region.

Contact the group and request if you could give a short presentation about seagrass and the Seagrass-Watch program at their next meeting or hold a special meeting and invite the different organisations (encourage participation from all sectors).

Prepare some visual materials (the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator can assist you), attend the meeting and give your presentation. Your presentation should include:

- A brief introduction to seagrass and the importance of seagrass
- An overview of Seagrass-Watch monitoring program.
- Seagrass-Watch monitoring activities. For this you could take along a quadrat, a standard seagrass cover sheet, and datasheet, and explain how they are used and the importance of them to the program.
- Open Discussion. Ask the group about the history of the area, what changes do they notice about the seagrass meadows. Discuss ways that the community would like to be involved and how is the best way to keep them informed of upcoming monitoring activities.



Maintain open communication lines with the community, yourself and the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator. Incorporate the suggestions and outcomes of the meeting into your monitoring program.

### 3.2.2. Assessment of available resources

Before a community group commits to an ongoing monitoring strategy, the group needs to assess available resources - this includes on-ground people with sufficient time, boats, *etc.*

In most cases, the on-ground commitment to monitor a site is four afternoons a year. Involvement beyond that, is up to individuals, as they may choose to monitor more than 1 site or may chose to be involved with the coordination and management of the program in their locality/region.

### 3.2.3. Workshops & training

Once a group of volunteers is formed, they will want training by the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator and qualified scientists. Training of volunteers is usually comprised of three components – formal lectures, field training exercises, and laboratory exercises. Training includes hands on experience with standard methodologies used for seagrass mapping and monitoring (see Chapter 5. Methods for Monitoring Seagrass Status).

Methods used in the program however can be modified to a degree based on feedback from participants during the training exercises.

Participants are trained to identify local seagrass species, undertake rapid visual assessment methods (% seagrass cover), preserve seagrass samples in a herbarium, use a GPS, photograph quadrats, identify presence of dugong feeding trails or other impacts, and the use, analysis and interpretation (including Geographic Information Systems) of the data collected.

Follow up (“refresher”) training is an important component of the program to ensure that data collection is rigorous. Training aids have been developed in consultation with the community and include this manual, a training video, field data books, and photographic reference sheets.

### **3.3. The Seagrass-Watch program structure**

The Seagrass-Watch program involves collaboration between community, qualified scientists and the data users (environment management agencies). The level of involvement depends on community resources; local coordination; local support; available capital, and scientific expertise.

An effective way to ensure collaboration is the formation of Regional Steering Committees within each project region to ensure that project goals and milestones are being met and to work through any difficulties. Although Regional Steering Committees are not essential, they are recommended. An efficient way to form a committee is to hold a public workshop or seminar and invite various local stakeholders of the community.

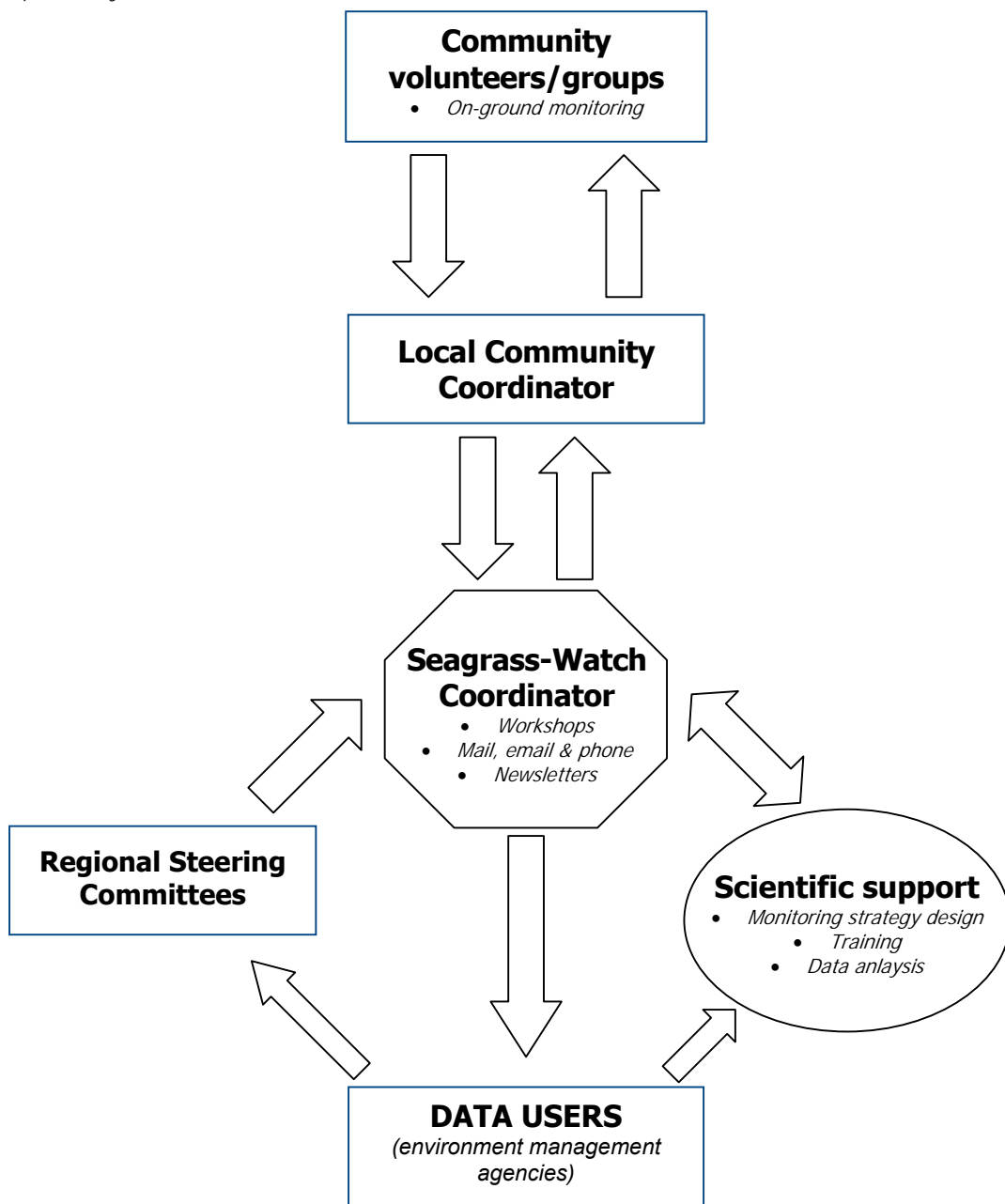
The main contact in each region is a Local Community Coordinator who is a link in the information and data chain between local communities and the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator. Community groups are encouraged to meet periodically to update members on the project status and coordinate volunteers to monitor sites and conduct extension activities to raise public awareness (local festivals and displays).

Local Coordinators are volunteers within a region who are willing to ensure that:

- (1) **The community has the opportunity to provide advice and may make recommendations based on their local knowledge at the start of the program that could save a lot of time and effort**. E.g., the community may know that the seagrass meadow changes seasonally and may recommend a better location for a monitoring site.
- (2) **There is a communication link between the community and the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator (scientists)**. The sharing of knowledge between scientists and local experts is equally valuable and may lead to numerous different types of benefits for both groups.

- (3) **Community awareness about seagrass will be increased.** Raising awareness on environmental issues (e.g., seagrass) and the wise use of natural resources is always a positive outcome.
- (4) **The monitoring site will be left undisturbed.** If the community are aware of the program and the importance of not interfering with the monitoring site, then the monitoring program will not be compromised by curious people removing station markers and other equipment.

Below is a stylised model of the Seagrass-Watch program structure and information pathways.



## **3.4. Community Resources & funding**

The most important community resource is people. The time and effort that communities contribute to monitoring activities is fundamental to the ongoing success and credibility of the program. The more people involved the greater a sense of community and the wider sharing of information between the program and the community.

Although not a necessity, funding is also an important consideration of Seagrass-Watch. Funding may be required to assist with scientific support, purchase equipment (Seagrass-Watch Monitoring Kit, see Appendix V), and reimburse travel costs and vessel hire. Funding also increases the likelihood of long-term continuation/sustainability of monitoring.

### **3.4.1. Funding requirements**

The amount of funding required by a group to participate is dependent on several factors, and groups should evaluate their needs. Most of these needs are identified when designing the monitoring strategy, and may include:

#### **Equipment**

A kit of equipment is necessary for monitoring. Also, as most monitoring at a locality or in a region occurs within a 1-2 week period, the number of kits required to logistically monitor will be dependent on the number of sites. A monitoring kit can cost anywhere between AUS\$100 and AUS\$1000. An inventory of a typical monitoring kit is provided in Appendix V.

#### **Travel**

Some volunteers will require assistance to cover travel costs, if the sites they monitor are not in the vicinity of their homes. The amount of travel assistance required will depend on

- The number of sites
- Accessibility of sites
- Type of site (intertidal or subtidal)
- Frequency of monitoring

#### **Scientific Support**

On-ground scientific support is currently limited. Regular visits by the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator or other scientists can be expensive and groups should consider mechanisms for autonomy without compromising data quality and data assurance. Scientific support is required for interpretation of the data and the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator can provide regular feedback on the trends in seagrass meadow status and condition. The Seagrass-Watch Coordinator also plays an important role in feeding information to relevant coastal management agencies.

## **Permits**

On-ground monitoring in some locations may require permits (e.g., Marine Parks). For a permit to be issued, there is often a fee required. You will need to check with local authorities (QPWS) and the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator before conducting any monitoring program in marine waters.

Marine Plant permits are required in Queensland for any work on seagrasses, however groups which are part of the official Seagrass-Watch program are covered under the DPI Marine Plant Ecology Group's permit (no fee required). If you are unsure if you are covered, check with the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator

### **3.4.2. Funding opportunities**

Most Seagrass-Watch and environment groups have access to several types of funding. Funding can also be through gaming funds, port authorities, private companies, and through government grants (e.g., CoastCare). Some groups raise funds through public events, raffles, *etc.*

Groups should also consider that to receive funding they may be required to incorporate. Incorporation may be a legal or auditing requirement. For more information you will need to contact the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator or the relevant funding body.

You can coordinate grants with scientific, community and agency stakeholders and establish links to other programs such as CoastCare, Reef Watch, Water Watch. Many local authorities (e.g., city councils) have grants officers who may be able to assist.

#### ***Further Reading:***

IIRR. (1998). "Introductory Papers - Volume 1". Participatory methods in community-based coastal resource management. International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, Silang, Cavite, Philippines.

Ward, N. (2000). WaterWatch Victoria estuarine monitoring manual - draft 1. (Coasts & Clean Seas). 87pp.