

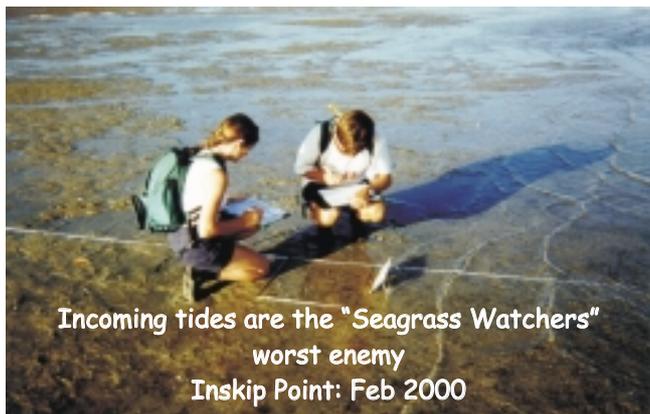
Queensland *news* Seagrass-Watch

ISSUE 5,
FEBRUARY 2000

Welcome to an exciting new year (*and new millennium?*). This is the second year since Seagrass-Watch officially began in Queensland. Continued support by communities and all levels of government will ensure it is also the programs most successful year.

What's Been Happening in the past couple of months?

Seagrass-Watch volunteers and the Marine Plant Ecology Group have been extremely busy over the past couple of months. Two field trips to the Hervey Bay region and 1 to the Whitsundays have generated a mountain of quality data on the condition of the seagrasses in these regions. Some of the data has been examined. As the program is still within its 1st year of monitoring, interpretation of results is difficult without a clear understanding of the seasonal patterns that occur in these regions. The first year of monitoring will provide this background information.



Incoming tides are the "Seagrass Watchers" worst enemy
Inskip Point: Feb 2000

Plans are underway to expand the number of sites in the Great Sandy Straits and Whitsundays regions. These additional sites will ensure that all representative seagrass habitats in each region are being monitored. This will involve some new techniques and novel approaches to access sites.

In the 1800's seagrass was used by furniture makers in New York to stuff their cushions



Seagrass Forum

Planning for a seagrass forum on community monitoring of coastal vegetated habitats is underway and gaining momentum. Discussions between interested individuals and groups are continuing in view of a proposed date around October 2001. The forum aims to provide theoretical and practical experiences to people involved in monitoring of coastal habitats. It will provide a forum where people from all over Australia and overseas can discuss their experiences and learn from others. A steering committee will oversee the general direction of the Forum and an organising committee has been established to plan the fine details of this exciting event. Stay tuned for further details.

Seagrass-Watch calendar for the year 2000

A "year 2000" calendar has been distributed to all Seagrass-Watch volunteers and other affiliated people across Queensland. The desktop calendar serves not only as colourful and flashy addition to your desktop but also provides a means for volunteers to make observations (eg *washed up seagrass on local beach, dugong sighted, fruits/flowers sighted etc*) and send them through to the Seagrass-Watch coordinator in Cairns. If you haven't received one and would like one there are still a limited number available.



HINT: To keep your calendar standing straight, attach a bulldog clip (or similar) to the lower back spine.

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The hooded plover and red-capped dotterel nest in sand depressions next to vegetation or beached seagrass accumulations

Hervey Bay Happenings!

Long-term monitoring in Hervey Bay and the Great Sandy Straits

Twenty one sites were surveyed across the region in November 1999 and February 2000. Special thanks to John Roberts and Gary Nielson for the use of their boats to access sites. Many volunteers have now "adopted" sites in their local areas. Not only are families and individuals involved, but school groups have entered the scene. On Thursday 17th February Greg Lynch and his students from Fraser Anglican College monitored a site at Dundowran (DD2). Greg is keen to have his students adopt the site as part of their environmental studies. The day was very busy with both newspaper and T.V. coverage of the event.



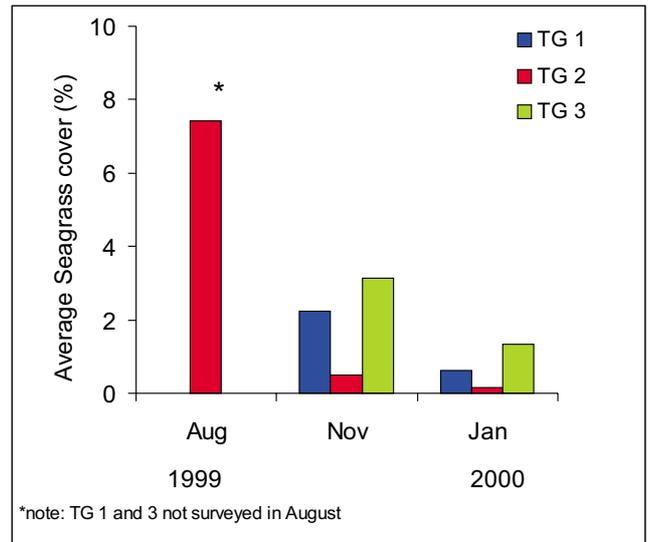
Great Sandy Straits Safari

As part of efforts to expand representation of sites in the Great Sandy Straits, members of the HBDSMP are voyaging on an "African Queen" style adventure to locate and establish new sites in the Straits. The survey will take place on the 18-20th March led by skipper Jerry "Bogart" Comans. The sites will complete the coverage of sites to adequately monitor the Straits and provide valuable information on the effects of boating activities on seagrasses.

Hervey Bay Case Study

The aim of the Seagrass-Watch program is to collect information on changes in seagrass meadow characteristics so as to provide a reliable early warning system on the status of our seagrass resources. The information collected by volunteers covers many sites. **Toogoom** is located in the northern part of Hervey Bay and issues of concern include stormwater and land runoff from adjacent creeks. The sites are surveyed by Ian McLaren, Marie Cliff and Lauren and Dallas Curry.

The graph below shows an apparent decline in seagrass cover at all Toogoom sites between August 1999 and January 2000. This decline in cover may simply be seasonal or due to some other factor (e.g. shift in sands, epiphytes). The data that volunteers collect over the next 6 months should explain whether these patterns are associated with natural variation. Should declines continue, a closer scientific examination may be required.



Subtidal monitoring

Preliminary discussions have also been held with Gary Pomeroy from the Dive Club in Torquay. The establishment of some long-term subtidal monitoring sites may occur in the very near future...stay tuned for details of these underwater adventures in Hervey Bay!! These sites will be surveyed to monitor the recovery of seagrass meadows affected by the Mary River flood in February 1999.

Next Trip to Hervey Bay

The Marine Plant Ecology Group will be joining the local volunteers to monitor the permanent sites in Hervey Bay and Great Sandy Straits between 1-7th May. If you are interested in attending any events during this time, please contact HBDSMP Project Officer Jerry Comans on 07 - 4124 2393 for details.

Good tides for Seagrass-Watch Hervey Bay (Burnett Heads)

April 3-7

Lowest tide is 0.44m on Wednesday 5th at 3.12 pm.

May 1-7

Lowest tide is 0.33m on Thursday 4th at 2.41 pm.

June 1-5

Lowest tide is 0.27m on Friday 2th at 2.15 pm.



Whitsunday Wanderings!

Whitsundays: Sites and Status

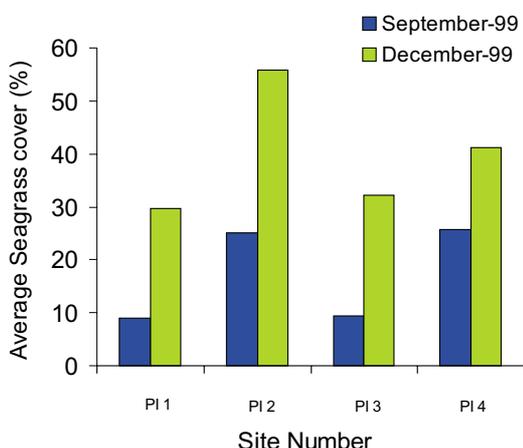
Currently 4 intertidal sites have been established at Pigeon Island and 2 subtidal sites at Whitehaven beach. Increasing the number of sites, both in intertidal and subtidal areas, is currently being planned. Talks with Midge Point and Hideaway Bay residents will take place in March. In April additional subtidal sites at Cid Harbour on Whitsunday Island will also be investigated.

Pigeon Island: Yule-tide monitoring

Notwithstanding the very early morning tides and the extra demands of Christmas, the Whitsunday's volunteers deserve a special mention for their efforts in ensuring that monitoring of the seagrasses at Pigeon Island in December was completed. The four sites were monitored from 22-24 December at 4-5 am in the morning. A truly great effort with the rising sun and rising yule-tides. By the sound of it Amanda and Margaret Parr had a very muddy and wet Xmas eve.

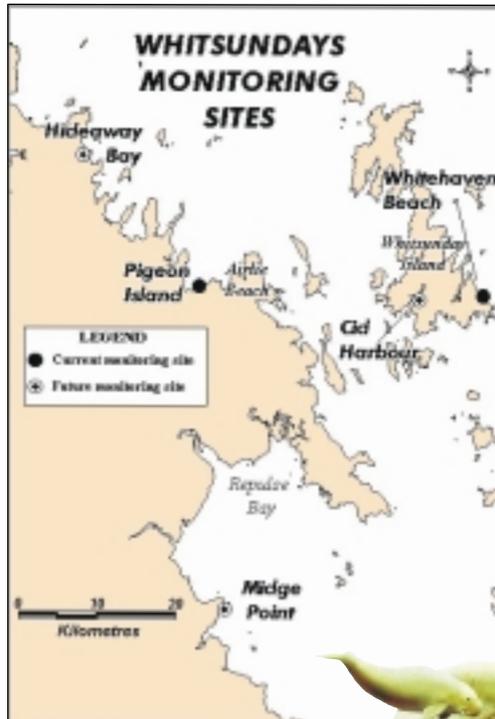
Whitsundays Case Study

Despite the trying conditions the data collected from **Pigeon Island** has proved to be of very high quality. The graph shown indicates that at all sites there has been an increase in seagrass cover from September to December. This reflects increased growth over Spring and tells us that the methods used by the volunteers are able to detect seasonal changes.

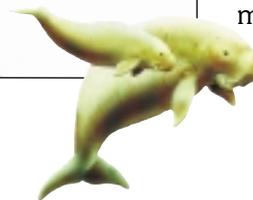


Whitsunday Beach: subtidal monitoring sites

The Order of Underwater Coral Heroes (OUCH) volunteer group again successfully carried out a subtidal survey of the Whitehaven Beach area on Wednesday the 26th of January. Two sites were surveyed, thanks go to Tony Fontes, Jeff Williams, Amanda Parr and Andrew Barry from *Maxi Ragamuffin* who skippered the *Azura* in between the numerous moored charter vessels.



Monitoring over whole meadows of seagrasses at Whitehaven Beach along subtidal transects will be repeated 4 times a year. The aim is to assess impacts that anchors have on the abundance and species composition of the seagrass meadows. This will enable marine park managers to make informed decisions about the management of boat moorings in the Whitsundays.



Next trip to the Whitsundays

The next surveys in the Whitsundays in Pioneer Bay will be on the 18-19th March. Training sessions for new volunteers will be conducted on both days prior to the surveys. In mid-April more underwater surveys with OUCH will take place. Please contact Amanda Parr or Tony Fontes (contact details on last page) if you would like to join in.

Good tides for monitoring Pigeon Island Sites

April 14-18

Lowest tide 0.39m on Saturday 15th at 3.00 pm.

May 2-5

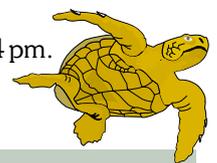
Lowest tide 0.34m on Thursday 4th at 4.37 pm.

June 10-15

Lowest tide 0.38m on Monday 12th at 2.05 pm.

June 28-30

Lowest tide 0.09m on Friday 30th at 3.14 pm.



Queensland Seagrass-Watch *news* continued ..

Seagrass-Watch Logo Design

Some great entries have been received and thanks to the entries from the Columba Catholic College in Charters Towers for their great efforts! The closing date of the logo design competition has been extended until June 2000 as entries have been very slow to arrive. If you design the winning Seagrass-Watch logo, you'll be rewarded with a prize. Send entries to the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator at DPI Northern Fisheries Centre.

The new Seagrass Watch Co-ordinator Arrives

"Hi, I'm Stuart Campbell. I've already met many of you and am really keen to keep Seagrass-Watch moving along. I've worked in marine biology in Australia, the U.K. and Antarctica for the past 15 years. I've also worked and volunteered for environmental groups including the ACF and with Greenpeace. I was recently with the Environment Protection Authority monitoring seagrass habitats in Victoria where major die-off has occurred due to catchment inputs. I'm looking forward to working with all volunteers closely to ensure that the information collected maintains its sound scientific basis and that everyone involved is kept informed about what the information they are collecting is actually telling us. Please don't hesitate to contact me on 4035 0113 or email me on campbes@dpi.qld.gov.au.



Coastcare Grants

Remember the next round of applications for Coastcare funding opens on 18 March and closes on 16 June 2000. Projects will be considered up to \$30,000. If you would like to start planning a small-scale Seagrass-Watch program in your area contact your local Environment Protection Agency for details of Coastcare Facilitators in your area, or contact us and we'll be happy to put you in contact with the right person.

Northern News

In the October 1999 issue there was news on plans to expand Seagrass-Watch into the Port Douglas region. Unfortunately the application to establish a program in the "Far North" was unsuccessful. With the current round of Coast and Clean Seas funding, an application is planned for the Townsville region. If you or a community group are interested please contact the co-ordinator to see if you can assist.

Seagrass-Watch programs are funded by the Natural Heritage Trust-Coasts and Clean Seas Program and the CRC for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Do you want to get Involved?

Contact your local Seagrass Watch representatives:

Hervey Bay:

Jerry Comans (Hervey Bay Dugong and Seagrass Monitoring Program)

Ph. (07) 4124 2393

Whitsundays:

Amanda Parr (Whitsunday Volunteers Association) Airlie Beach

Ph. (07) 4946 4996

Tony Fontes (Order of Underwater Coral Heroes Volunteers) Airlie Beach

Ph. (07) 4946 7435



Volunteers from left, John Roberts, Sue-Ellen Redenbach and Lawry Wilson get stuck into monitoring seagrasses at Boonooroo in the Great Sandy Straits. This particular site is accessible by boat and is one where dugong feeding trails and turtles are regularly sighted. Issues of concern include catchment runoff from land cleared for agricultural purposes.



Any comments or suggestions about the Seagrass-Watch program would be greatly appreciated.

NEXT ISSUE OUT JUNE 2000

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