

## Watching the Wind and Seagrass at Bushland Beach!



If the southeast winter breezes pleasantly cooled our Shelley Beach survey earlier this month, it went up a knot or ten at the Bushland Beach seagrass-watch survey held last Saturday (22<sup>nd</sup> July). Fourteen volunteers braved the strong southerly winds to carry out the 3<sup>rd</sup> seagrass-watch survey at Bushland Beach for this year.

Pointing towards the smaller land-mass near Magnetic Island, Lux Foot our captain and site coordinator proclaimed to the troops: “Head towards that island; that’s where our marker is!”. Uncertain by such a proclamation, Sue Mulvany on her first ever trip to Bushland Beach smiled unconvincingly; “After you then?”. Traipsing the firm sand we were met head-on by the bellowing wind, reducing any chance of chitchat. Only a slight tilt of the head away from the wind, one could hear an attempt to converse. It certainly reminded me of my youthful days at Lyall Beach near the Wellington Airport in New Zealand, thankfully without the dreaded wind-chill factor which could plummet a balmy 15°C day to -5°C. A scream pierced the deafening wind, as Sharon’s top-less hat took to the air and catapulted 10 metres away. We became all too aware of the need to hug everything from our buckets, backpacks to our sunnies.

Finding the permanent marker was incredibly easy thanks to the assistance of the DPI&F team doing research near the site. A slight oversight by the seagrass-watch team meant John had to rush back to Lux’s place to get our quadrats. Laying the 50-metre tapes proved to be our biggest challenge, as the wind refused to cooperate. Where a straight line was needed, the wind gave us a semi-circle. After much towing and pulling, we secured the first transect, and then the other two were purely academic. While we waited for John and the quadrats to arrive, we began with coring and seed counting. The memory of the record 82 seeds counted at the Shelley Beach survey, still lingers amongst those who were lucky to have been there. Suffice to say no records were broken on the day.

Once the quadrats arrived, Rose and I teamed up on transect one; Gary and Sue took to transect two and Flora and Sharon on transect three. Lux explored his creative site and armed with a digital camera, proved quite adept at forcing seagrass-smiles out of us. Ian and Ian junior, continued alongside the surveyors, coring the sand in search of the elusive black-*Halodule* seeds, whilst John recorded. Before we reached the end of our transects, the DPI&F scientists completed their research and came over and assisted us. The proficient assistance allowed us to complete our work in good time, meaning we could proceed to the sheltered barbeque site for a deserved lunch. Reliable John had the barby fired, and the snags where they



rightly belong. Lux with his billy boiled poured Dilmah tea to the troops, with partisan support from Shani. The cold drinks, carefully packed in a 12-kilo icebox and single-handedly carried by Naomi Smith to the site, cooled those of us who may have overheated a bit on our way back. The last snag was downed and the site tidied before we bade farewell to the rest of the team. Lux promises more barbies in future Bushland Beach surveys; a nice touch to end a fantastic outing.

Concerning seagrass communities, the Bushland Beach site is composed primarily of *Halodule uninervis* and *Halophila ovalis*. Seagrass-watchers have noticed populations of *Zostera* and the occasional presence of *Halophila spinulosa* at Bushland Beach. Drifts of *Cymodocea serrulata* are also seen, both at Shelley Beach (last survey) and Bushland Beach. We encourage you to share your observations with other seagrass-watchers, and it is important that we record any anomalies or unusual presence or absence of seagrass. For more information on seagrass communities and the results from previous surveys, please go to the seagrass-watch website: [www.seagrasswatch.org](http://www.seagrasswatch.org).

As we are truly in the middle of the Southern Hemisphere winter, there are noticeable changes to the marine flora, especially the seaweeds. Cool waters usually favour green seaweeds, thus you may have seen floating green seaweeds along brackish waters (canals, channels and mud-and rock-pools). This string-like seaweed was once called *Enteromorpha*, is now known as *Ulva*. There are over 100 species of *Ulva*, some are eaten in Japan and other Asian countries.

Our Bushland Beach survey also found *Caulerpa taxifolia*, a beautiful green seaweed that looks like a fern or a palm-leaf, but is a highly invasive species in some places like the Mediterranean. In tropical places (including Queensland) *Caulerpa taxifolia* does not pose a problem and is considered a natural part of the marine flora.

A report on the seagrass-watch surveys from Bushland Beach is being prepared by Lux, and you can read all about it, in the next issue of SeagrassWatch Newsletter. The Townsville-Thuringowa Community SeagrassWatch would like to thank Lux and his team for the excellent coordination of the surveys. Our thanks go to the Northern Beaches Rotary for hosting the barbeque and the event, and to DPI&F and SeagrassWatch Headquarters for providing the refreshments. Our volunteers included our visiting SeagrassWatcher from Tanzania - Flora Akwilapo - many thanks.

Our next seagrass-watch survey for Bushland Beach is scheduled for October 7<sup>th</sup>.

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