



# Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

10 April 2008

Seagrass-Watch's electronic news service, providing marine and coastal news of international and national interest. Abbreviated articles are presented with links to their source. Seagrass-Watch HQ recommends that readers exercise their own skill and care with respect to their use of the information in this bulletin and that readers carefully evaluate the accuracy, currency, completeness and relevance of the material in the bulletin for their purposes. Seagrass-Watch welcomes feedback on the bulletins, and you are free to distribute it amongst your own networks.

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## NEWS

### **High traffic cops rap in Pittwater (NSW, Australia)**

28 March 2008, *The Manly Daily*

Speed limits for boats should be lowered, jet skis banned and seagrass beds protected from moorings, an independent consultants report to Pittwater Council has determined. The investigation by WBM suggests Pittwater has reached saturation point for recreational, commercial and commuter boating, which is leading to growing problems on our waterways.

According to the study, presented to a public meeting last night, boat wash was among the main causes of foreshore erosion. Areas most critically affected were Palm Beach, Careel Bay, Paradise Beach, Crystal Bay, Yachtsmans Paradise, Rowland Reserve and McCarrs Creek.

Pittwater Council natural resources manager Mia Dalby-Ball said setting speed limits, banning jetskis and limiting or moving swing moorings was a matter for NSW Maritime, which was expected to attend the meeting last night. NSW Maritime is preparing a plan of management for boating in the area which the council hopes can be incorporated into its plan for Pittwater.

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

## **UAVs find role in marine mammal surveillance (Brisbane, Australia)**

26 March, 2008, *Cosmos*

This month a flying robot has been pressed into service off the coast of Australia to swoop low over the sea and carry out aerial surveys of endangered dugongs and whales. Packed into a tiny, low-flying plane, a crew of five marine scientists and their pilot slowly circle a patch of ocean off Queensland, over and over, around and around. Below them, munching away on seagrass, dugongs congregate in their thousands.

Starting this month, wildlife biologist Amanda Hodgson, from the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia and her teammate Michael Noad, will be among the first in the world to trial the use of UAVs in wildlife surveillance. Their aim is to evaluate the surveying capabilities of a camera-mounted, unmanned flight system. Their work will focus on counting populations of dugongs and humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*).

If all goes well, the researchers believe an unmanned approach to aerial surveying would make studies easier, eliminate the human risk element, and reduce costs. It may also offer improved accuracy, and allow remote and hostile environments to be studied with ease.

*more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>*

## **Short-snouted seahorses have been discovered in the river Thames (London,UK)**

08 April 2008, *InTheNews.co.uk*

Improved water quality in the river Thames has led to a number of short-snouted seahorses being able to live there. These seahorses are usually found in shallow muddy waters, estuaries or seagrass beds.

Conservationists discovered the seahorses in the Thames about 18 months ago during routine wildlife monitoring work. The news was not released before though as until April 6th the creatures were not covered by the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

The short-snouted seahorse, along with the water vole, angel shark, roman snail and long-snouted seahorse, now have legal protection against being killed, injured or taken from the wild. Alison Shaw, marine and freshwater conservation programme manager at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), said the discovery of seahorses in the Thames demonstrates that the river "is becoming a sustainable biodiverse habitat for aquatic life".

"It is not clear how endangered short-snouted seahorses are because there is little data known, particularly in the UK, so every scrap of information is valuable," she added. "Now they are protected conservationists are more relaxed about telling the world they are there

*Full story and source: <http://www.inthenews.co.uk/news/science/conservationists-discover-seahorses-in-river-thames-1217795.htm>*

*Related links: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/domesticNews/idUKL078667320080407> ;*

*<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601102&sid=aLByINQQmofE&refer=uk> ;*

*<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/apr/07/water.wildlife> ;*

*<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article3695046.ece> ;*

## **Anna breaks mould (Suva, Fiji)**

07 April 2008, *Fiji Times*

Ana Tuiwai is defying the odds by becoming a certified diver. The 27-year-old was born and bred in Lomati, Kabara, in Lau. For Ana, doing household chores and fishing every Saturday was the life. She never thought she would do something like scuba diving.

"In 2004, Frances Areki from the World Wildlife Fund came to Kabara to do something on the vesu. "That's when I first heard about WWF. The following year, Monifa Fiu from WWF came to the Kabara and wanted to me help with surveys on the reef and seagrass.

Later that year, she took part in a WWF-sponsored dive training at Dravuni, Kadavu. Ana has become a WWF volunteer and helps in dive training for island youths.

*Full story and source: <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=85744>*

## **Virginia speaker faces crab sanctuary criticism (Salisbury, MD, USA)**

05 April 2008, *Salisbury Daily Times*

A top expert on blue crab ecology and conservation found no exception this week when he gave a lecture at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science laboratory in Wachapreague. Rom Lipcius, VIMS professor of marine science, faced pointed criticism from watermen in the audience who voiced concern over a decision by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission to close the 1,000-plus-acre lower bay crab sanctuary one month earlier than usual, leaving it off-limits from May 1 to Sept. 15. The early closure is meant to further protect spawning females and allow the stock to replenish from a historical low last year.

Lipcius' talk sponsored by VIMS and Citizens for a Better Eastern Shore came at a sensitive time when local crabbers face economic loss due to the early closure and while additional measures are being considered to counteract low blue crab catches over the last several years.

The decline in blue crab population in the Chesapeake Bay is due to several factors, Lipcius said -- including the loss of over half the eelgrass beds since 1972 and growing numbers of predatory fish. A recent study showed that 4 percent of the juvenile crab population in seagrass beds was eaten by striped bass. But Lipcius said if everything goes well the blue crab stock could recover within "a couple of years ... because they're so fecund." Pruitt had one more comment at the end of the scientist's talk: "I don't think anybody's got the answer; like the old-timer says (about crabs), they come, they go and they bite -- that's all anybody knows."

*Full story and source: <http://www.dailytimesonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080405/NEWS01/804050322/1002>*

### **Marine reserves to reduce fishing area by 20% (United Kingdom)**

*04 April 2008, Telegraph.co.uk*

Up to 20 per cent of British waters could be closed to activities such as fishing and oil exploration to protect threatened species under a Bill due to be published in draft.

Research carried out for the Government by the University of Bangor shows that a network of reserves covering 14-20 per cent of British waters would be enough to protect declining species such as the angel shark, porbeagle and common skate. The draft Bill will establish Marine Conservation Zones to protect Britain's marine wildlife where damaging activities, which could be as minor as the dropping of anchor chains on seagrass beds, will be controlled.

The Bill, which the Government has promised to introduce within the lifetime of this Parliament, will also introduce controversial measures to give public access to some of the third of the coastline in England where it does not yet exist.

*Full story and source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/main.jhtml?xml=/earth/2008/04/02/eamarine102.xml>*

*Related links: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/main.jhtml?xml=/earth/2008/04/03/eaeco203.xml>*

### **NASA International Space Station Imagery: Al Wadj Bank, Saudi Arabia (USA)**

*02 April 2008, Space Ref (press release)*

Al Wadj Bank, Saudi Arabia is featured in this image photographed by an Expedition 16 crewmember on the International Space Station.

Saudi Arabia boasts the most coral reefs of any Middle Eastern country, as it includes coastline along both the Red Sea and Gulf of Arabia. This high resolution image depicts a portion of the Al Wadj Bank, located along the northern Red Sea coast. Despite the relatively high salinity of Red Sea water (compared to other oceans), approximately 260 species of coral are found here, according to scientists. Large tracts of the Saudi Arabian coastline are undeveloped, and reefs in these areas are in generally good ecological health. However, reefs located near large urban centers like Jeddah have suffered degradation due to land reclamation, pollution, and increased terrigenous sediment input.

The Al Wadj Bank includes a healthy and diverse reef system, extensive seagrass beds, and perhaps the largest population of dugong -- a marine mammal similar to the North American manatee -- in the eastern Red Sea. The portion of the Bank in this image illustrates the complex form and topography of the reef system. Several emergent islands (tan) - surrounded primarily by dark green seagrass - are visible, the largest located at top left. Only the islands are above the waterline -- over the reef structures the water color ranges from light teal (shallow) to turquoise (increasing depth). The southern edge of the reef is well indicated by the deep, dark blue water of the Red Sea at image top.

*Full story and source: <http://www.spaceref.com/news/viewsr.html?pid=27533>*

### **Ecosystem lessons for John Gray High (Grand cayman, Cayman Islands)**

*03 April 2008, Cayman Net News*

Twenty students from John Gray High School (JGHS) attended an Eco-Weekend in Little Cayman Research Centre as part of the Central Caribbean Marine Institute's education and outreach mission. Greenlight Re Company sponsored the Friday, 14 March to Sunday, 16 March programme in the Sister Islands.

"Our textbooks came alive on this trip and allowed us to further appreciate our ecosystem from a participant's perspective," the JGHS said in joint statement. "The trip took us on journeys to the Rocky Shore and the Seagrass Beds. This allowed us to examine the organisms closely and get a better sense of the beauty of our islands."

The students studied a wide range of topics covering marine ecology and conservation, and learnt new field sampling techniques with the aim of improving their analytical and critical thinking skills.

*Full story and source: <http://www.caymannetnews.com/news-6417--1-1--.html>*

## **Bid to expand Monaco 'will create sea desert' (UK)**

30 March 2008, Times Online

Plans to enlarge the tiny tax haven of Monaco by building a new district at sea have hit opposition from environmentalists, who warn that the ambitious expansion would produce an "undersea desert". They argue that the construction, a bit like a giant oil rig and a project close to the heart of Prince Albert, ruler of the principality, will put at risk protected "meadows" of seagrass.

"The building will make a huge shadow and the marine ecosystem will suffer from this," said H el ene Granouillac, of the Blue Earth marine protection association in Nice. "There is a danger of creating a sea desert where nothing can live." The idea is to erect the new district on giant pillars but Granouillac said that these could affect currents "that are so precious to the seagrass". She was referring to a nearby field of *Posidonia oceanica*, more commonly known as Neptune grass, a genus that grows in the Mediterranean and off the coast of Australia. This, she said, was a "nursery" for many species of fish, including sea horses. The seagrass, which has been protected under European Union regulations since 1988, also absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, helping to slow climate change.

Albert, who drives an electric car, prides himself on being a zealous environmentalist. Hence his insistence that, unlike previous, more modest extensions to the national territory accomplished by building embankments at sea, the new district should be erected on pylons.

Full story and source: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article3646414.ece>

## **Turbidity levels up in Swan Bay (Geelong, Victoria, Australia)**

20 March 2008, Geelong Advertiser

An increase in Swan Bay turbidity levels was recorded for the second week in a row but bay dredging was not to blame, the Environmental Monitor said yesterday. On March 12 there was a slight rise in turbidity in Swan Bay, but it was caused by the ebb and flood of the tide and wind, the monitor said.

Figures released yesterday for March 10 to 17 show turbidity levels peaked around six nephelometric turbidity units (NTU), below the limit of 30 NTU set to protect the bay's seagrass.

Environmental Monitor Mick Bourke said the Channel Deepening Project had not breached any turbidity limits and that the Office of the Environmental Monitor was keeping a close watch on dredging activities to ensure all work conformed to the rule book. "Turbidity levels in the north and south of the bay remain well below the environmental limits set to protect important bay assets such as seagrass and fish," he said.

Full story and source: [http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/article/2008/03/20/12368\\_news.html](http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/article/2008/03/20/12368_news.html)

## **GALLERY**

**Whitsundays (Qld, Australia): 04 - 07 April 2008** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Hamilton Is, 04-05 April 2008

Hydeaway Bay, 05 April 2008

Pioneer Bay, 06-07 April 2008

## **FROM HQ**

**Frequently Asked Questions** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/faq.html>

**Seagrass-Watch News Issue 32** <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
- Bookmarks
- Stickers
- Seagrass-Watch Newsletters 28, 30, 31, 32 (hardcopy)

**Future sampling dates** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/sampling.html>

**Handy Seagrass Links** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/links.html>

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