



Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

13 May 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.

Happy Birthday Seagrass-Watch!

March 2008 marked Seagrass-Watch's 10th year. On behalf of Seagrass-Watch HQ we would like to say thank you for your support.

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NEWS

Volunteers Change Our World (Australia)

12 May 2008

National Volunteer Week (NVW) will be held from the 12th to 18th May 2008. The theme of NVW is "Volunteers Change Our World".

National Volunteer Week is an opportunity to highlight the role of volunteers in our communities and to say thank you to the more than 5 million Australians who volunteer. National Volunteer Week (NVW) began in 1989 and was the first collaborative attempt to promote volunteering nationally.

As volunteering continues to grow we need to be more aware of the need to recognise what volunteers contribute to our world. There are many charities that would struggle to survive without the contribution of their volunteers. Major corporate organisations are also recognising what their staff can achieve as volunteers and encourage participation.
more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>.

Dugong trails galore (Queensland, Australia)

08 May 2008, Seagrass-Watch HQ News

You may not see them, even though they are as big as a cow. But if you look closely during low tide you may find evidence of their feeding. We're referring of course to dugongs. The large herbivorous marine mammal lives in the tropical waters of Australia. This year, their grazing trails are more obvious, leaving a bigger imprint on the seagrass meadows of the Far North.

Seagrass-Watch scientists are reporting a higher than usual number of Dugong Feeding Trails (DFT) at a number of Seagrass-Watch and Reef Water Quality Protection Program (RWQPP) monitoring sites across the Far North.

So next time you are wandering across the seagrass meadows of the Far North, keep a look out for those DFTs!
Healthy seagrass = Healthy dugongs!

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

A new star for Singapore: discovery of sea star (Singapore)

03 May 2008, Straits Times

SINGAPORE has a new star to call its own. This large five-rayed sea star (*Pentaceraster mammillatus*), is not new to science, but it is a new and spectacular addition to Singapore's already substantial inventory of living stars.

The sea star was first sighted early last month on a seagrass monitoring trip at Cyrene reef, run by volunteer group TeamSeagrass and staff from the National Biodiversity Reference Centre of the National Parks Board (NParks).

Sitting in the midst of intensive port activities, not far from the huge container terminal of Pasir Panjang, Cyrene Reef stands like a marine oasis - a trove of biodiversity in the midst of the nation's economic pulse. This sandy reef, swept clean of silt by strong currents when the tide is in, is as rich now biologically, if not richer, than in the 1990s.

That all this marine life exists in the middle of one of the busiest port zones in the world attests to the cleanliness of the seawater environment. Marine life thrives where water currents are sufficient to prevent smothering by sedimentation.

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

Divers, snorkelers needed for seagrass project (Norfolk, VA, USA)

06 May 2008, The Virginian-Pilot

Scientists are seeking volunteer divers and snorkelers to help expand an effort at restoring seagrasses in the coastal bays off the Eastern Shore. Interested divers would be trained, for free, in how to identify and collect certain types of grasses and shoots that scientists want to transplant elsewhere in the shallow bays along the Atlantic Ocean.

A training workshop is scheduled May 13, at 7:30 p.m., at the Anheuser-Busch Center for Coastal Research in Oyster, in Northampton County. As many as 100 volunteers are needed to assist in the project this spring, as sponsored by The Nature Conservancy, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

Full story and source: <http://hamptonroads.com/2008/05/divers-snorkelers-needed-seagrass-project>

PICRC comes up with 10 things to protect corals (Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, Micronesia)

09 May 2008, Marianas Variety

The Palau International Coral Reef Center came up with "10 things you can do" to protect corals, including: travelers choosing resorts and tour operators that properly treat all sewage and wastewater; For those operating the boat, PICRC said it can be navigated carefully to avoid contact with coral reefs and other vulnerable ecosystems such as seagrass beds and maintain engine equipment to prevent oil and gas spills.

The community is also asked to avoid purchasing tropical wood furniture or products obtained from clear-cut tropical forest causing siltation damage to coral reefs. "Coral reefs need our serious attention. Termed the "rainforests of the sea", coral reefs are home to one of every four marine species and are vital to maintaining the biological diversity of ocean ecosystems," PICRC said.

Full story and source: http://www.mvariety.com/?module=displaystory&story_id=10964&format=html

Mysterious algae blooms worry biologists (Miami,FL,USA)

03 May 2008, MiamiHerald.com

Algae has turned Florida Bay's waters a murky green, threatening the ecosystem below. What's causing the sudden blooms isn't clear.

Only a day earlier, the heart of Florida Bay's world-renowned fishing ground was clear enough to count turtle grass blades six feet down. Now, Pete Frezza stared into water so thick with algae it looked an awful lot like pea soup. Stick an arm in and you wouldn't see your hand.

Scientists who monitor Florida Bay and anglers who chase tarpon and bonefish in its maze of shallows are bracing for bigger, badder algae blooms in coming months. Environmentalists and veteran fishing guides like Tad Burke fear a rerun of the early 1990s, when a string of blooms decimated vast swaths of seagrass beds and sponges.

Scientists and managers of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Everglades National Park share the concern and are trying to figure what, if anything, to do.

Full story and source: <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/florida/story/520306.html>

People control conservation (Suva,Fiji)

04 May 2008, Fiji Times

Communities around Fiji are showing great leadership in protecting their natural resources. A long-running partnership between the Macuata community, government and non-government organisations has resulted in protection of vital natural resources in the area.

The success of communities in Macuata has been an inspiration to other parts of Fiji and the Pacific through the Locally Marine Area Network (LMMA). Recently, representatives from Macuata, WWF-global conservation organisation, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Wetlands International Oceania (WIO), the Fijian Locally Managed Marine Areas Network (FLMMA), the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the Fiji Government met to discuss the proposed reconfiguration of the network of protected areas (tabu sites) in Macuata. This is the first of a series of workshops that will lead to exciting conservation outcomes for the natural resources and biodiversity of Fiji.

This information is now being used to conduct a 'reconfiguration exercise', where the Macuata communities are encouraged to protect greater sections of their qoliqoli, not just in the sea but using an "ecosystem-based management" approach. This approach considers the linkages between the land, the rivers and the sea.

"WWF and partners hope the Macuata community will establish a network of protected areas that will include all habitat types in the qoliqoli, from the forest and rivers to seagrass beds, mangroves, coral reefs, deep water passages, and important breeding and foraging sites and migratory pathways for fish and other important species such as turtles and whales," said Mrs Kesaia Tabunakawai, interim representative of the WWF South Pacific Program.

Full story and source: <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=88188>

On the River: Studying the St. Johns like Never Before (Jacksonville,FL,USA)

02 May 2008, First Coast News

JACKSONVILLE, FL -- We headed out on the water with researchers trying to settle the St. Johns River water wars with science. Central Florida wants to draw millions of gallons a day from the St. Johns to keep taps flowing in the booming Orlando area. But First Coast leaders say taking that much water would do irreparable damage to the river.

If thirsty Central Florida starts taking a bigger gulp out of the St. Johns River, it won't make the river more shallow here. What it will do is allow more seawater from the ocean to back up into the St. Johns. So scientists are studying out how much seawater the river can take before it breaks. One of their focuses is seagrass health.

Healthy seagrass is one of the keys to -- healthy everything else. "Fish use it for reproducing; manatees, of course, eat it; turtles eat it; it's refuge for a lot of animals, crabs, things like that. So there's many, many species that rely on it," said Dean Dobberfuhr with the St. Johns River Water Management District.

Each spring and summer until the study's finished in late 2009, scientists will visit study sites near Mandarin and another area near the Shands Bridge every week. The researchers will then compare changes they spot in the seagrasses and algae with changes they see in the salt levels of the water, which is measured at nearby bridges.

Full story and source: <http://www.firstcoastnews.com/news/news-article.aspx?storyid=108404>

Bay's key underwater grass beds recovering, but long way to go (Newport News, VA, USA)

30 April 2008, Daily Press

The Chesapeake Bay's fields of underwater grasses, so vital to the imperiled blue crab stock, made baby steps toward recovery in 2007, but still cover far less area than scientists would like.

The bay-wide coverage of grass beds increased to 64,912 acres in 2007, from 59,610 acres in 2006, according to a report from the EPA-led Chesapeake Bay Program. Species such as eel grass, wild celery and widgeon grass suffered a massive die-back in 2005, when a summer of unusually hot, dry and calm conditions created harsh conditions that killed about 20,000 acres of grasses.

The report seemed to carry good news for creeks and rivers with fresher water, but bad news for saltier waters, where only two species can truly thrive. Scientists worry that one of those, eel grass, which requires a lot of sunlight, is suffering under cloudier water and warmer temperatures.

Huge swaths of eel grass once thrived at the mouth of the York River and in a region called the Poquoson Flats. Both began atrophying in the 1990s, and neither are showing signs of a comeback. "These beds are gone," said seagrass expert Bob Orth, of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science.

Eel grass is a particular concern for Orth. The grass is at the southern limit of its range here, and warmer summer water temperatures have become a concern. Orth is also worried that progress on the bay's clarity is reversing.

Full story and source: http://www.dailypress.com/news/local/dp-local_seagrass_0430apr30,0,2396282.story

Imitation Oyster Bars Can Bring Real Results (Tampa, FL, USA)

30 April 2008, Tampa Tribune

Though Tampa Bay has made huge strides toward recovery in water quality and habitat during the past 20 years, there are still vast areas of sandy "deserts" without grass or other cover, and those areas don't seem to be progressing as well as many areas of live flat.

There are numerous theories on why some areas simply can't seem to get started back on the road to productivity as fish nurseries, but one that seems highly reasonable is that "wave scouring" prevents the first sprouts of sea grass from taking hold. Large waves sweep the flats during storms, and there is also a sort of miniature tidal wave effect every time a large ship passes offshore of many flats; a roller as much as 3 feet tall rears up at the edge of the shallows and crashes down on the sand, washing away anything attempting to gain a foothold.

The energetic volunteers of Tampa Bay Watch are now pushing hard on a series of artificial oyster bars they say might be a remedy for this situation in many areas. The bars, made by encasing empty oyster shells in long mesh bags, create a breakwater wherever they are placed.

Full story and source: <http://www2.tbo.com/content/2008/apr/30/sp-imitation-oyster-bars-can-bring-real-results/>

Scientists replant key flora in the Caloosahatchee (Fort Myers, FL, USA)

29 April 2008, The News-Press

Researchers are hoping that aquatic grass plots planted Monday will sow seeds for the future health of the upper Caloosahatchee estuary.

A team of scientists from the South Florida Water Management District, the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation Marine Laboratory and Seagrass Recovery, an Indian Rocks Beach company dedicated to the preservation of seagrass, spent the day planting tape grass just upstream from the Franklin Lock and Dam.

Southwest Florida's ongoing drought has kept salinity in the Caloosahatchee abnormally high, and the high salinity has killed all the tape grass, also known as *Vallisneria*, downstream from the lock.

Full story and source: <http://www.news-press.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080429/NEWS0116/804290395/1075>

Lawmakers poised to strengthen seagrass protections (Marco Island, FL, USA)

28 April 2008, Marconews

TALLAHASSEE — Boaters who intentionally wander off the marked channel and chew up seagrass beds in Rookery Bay, the Ten Thousand Islands or other aquatic preserves could face a \$50 ticket or worse under a measure awaiting final passage in the Florida Senate.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Burt Saunders, R-Naples, creates a noncriminal violation for any person who “carelessly” operates a vessel outside a lawfully marked channel that causes propeller scarring within an aquatic preserve. A companion bill that also sets up a mitigation program opposed by environmental groups was approved by the House Monday. The two bills must be identical to pass.

The measure is related directly to damage of seagrass beds in aquatic preserves. Other boating laws carry penalties for other types of infractions when operators are outside of marked channels. A 1995 report from what is now the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute estimated that boats were scarring 173,000 acres of seagrass every year.

In 2004, a working group made up of environmentalists, marine industry representatives and state officials met to come up with a measure to reduce the damage. The original proposal introduced last year would have made it a criminal offense to destroy seagrass beds. The proposal also included a wider collection of water bodies.

Full story and source: <http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2008/apr/28/lawmakers-poised-strengthen-seagrass-protections/>

Turtle reveals oceanic highway (Australia)

28 April 2008, NEWS.com.au

AFTER a remarkable 1400km journey, she has finally arrived in WA. For two months green sea turtle Dorte has hitch-hiked the ocean currents from Java to WA in search of shallow waters full of lush green sea beds.

Dorte, who is thought to be at least 20-years-old, was tagged with a satellite tracking device as she lay a clutch of 136 eggs at a nesting beach in Java. Scientists believe she is heading to Eighty Mile beach, halfway between Broome and Port Hedland. “After laying her clutch she is now in her feeding phase. The best place to find seagrass beds is in shallow coastal waters and the west coast of Australia is perfect in that regard,” the ocean programme manager with WWF Australia, Dr Gilly Llewellyn told PerthNow.

“Dorte’s journey is unique. She has revealed an ‘oceanic superhighway’ that helps us better understand how marine turtles navigate around the world’s oceans as well as highlighting the strong ecological and evolutionary connections between Indonesia and Australia’s Kimberley-Pilbara coast,” she adds.

“This new finding throws the spotlight on the true natural values of the magnificent Kimberley marine ecosystem and its link to the Indonesian Coral Triangle to the north – the world’s epicentre of marine biodiversity and the cross-roads of migration routes and breeding grounds for whales, turtles, dolphins and other precious marine species,” Dr Llewellyn said.

Full story and source: <http://www.news.com.au/perthnow/story/0,21598,23612141-2761,00.html>

GALLERY

Pulau Semakau (Singapore): 10 May 2008 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

TeamSeagrass was out in full force for an early morning departure to Pulau Semakau with a team of nearly 30 people! The seagrass meadows of Semakau are vast, spanning kilometres and are home to all kinds of animals.

Torres Strait (Qld, Australia): 09 May 2008 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Hammond Island: HD1: 09 May 2008

The seagrass was still pretty long >30cm in length though density within the CR band did appear thinner. There was less algae but epiphyte cover was still relatively high.

Mission Beach (Qld, Australia): 03 - 04 May 2008 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Dunk Island: DI1 & DI2: 03 May 2008

There appears to have been negligible impact from the floods associated with the tropical monsoon this year, as the meadow at Dunk Island appears to have changed little since it was last monitored in September 2007.

Lugger Bay: LB1 & LB2: 04 May 2008

The seagrass meadow at Lugger Bay appears to be recovering well since it was nearly wiped out by Tropical Cyclone Larry in early 2006. Seagrass abundance has recovered to pre-cyclone levels, and dugong feeding trails were present for the first time since monitoring was established.

Poona, Great Sandy Strait (Qld, Australia): 03 May 2008 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Townsville (Qld, Australia): 02 - 06 May 2008 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Shelly Beach: SB2: 02 May 2008

While the seagrass was sparse, we had record counts on seeds. However this site still had more seagrass coverage than its replicate SB1 site (see below).

Bushland Beach: BB1: 03 May 2008

Seagrass was a lot sparser this month than it was in April. When the tide finally dropped it revealed a dead turtle near to the site. The turtle unfortunately had become entangled in a float line from a discarded crab pot.

Shelly Beach: SB1: 04 May 2008

Massive blowouts and gutters were still present throughout the site. This is a natural occurrence across these dynamic inter-tidal banks. Around the site the seagrass was still prevalent and even persists in small amounts within the site

Magnetic Is: MI1: 05 May 2008

The most striking feature on this visit was incidence of seagrass "burning", possibly a consequence of the longer exposure times during the day. As day time spring tides lengthen during the winter months in this region, seagrasses desiccate when exposed to air and wind.

Magnetic Is: MI2: 06 May 2008

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Workshop proceedings

McKenzie, LJ and Yoshida, RL (2008). Seagrass-Watch: Proceedings of a Workshop for Monitoring Seagrass Habitats in Hervey Bay and the Great Sandy Strait, Queensland. Urangan Community Centre, Hervey Bay Botanic Gardens, Hervey Bay, Queensland, 17th – 18th May 2008. (Seagrass-Watch HQ, Cairns). 40pp. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Training/proceedings/Hervey_Bay_wrkshp_May08.pdf

Seagrass-Watch

Mellors et al (2008). Seagrass-Watch: Engaging Torres Strait Islanders in marine habitat monitoring, Continental Shelf Research. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/Mellors_et_al_2008.pdf

Bulkeley, L. (2000). Benefits of community action in the environment: A case study of the Seagrass-Watch in Hervey Bay and the Whitsundays. Report to School for international Training, C.S.A Byron Bay. 39pp. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/Bulkeley_2000.pdf

Research Publications (Marine Ecology Group)

Sheppard et al (2008). Spatial patterns of sub-tidal seagrasses and their tissue nutrients in the Torres Strait, northern Australia: Implications for management, http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Sheppard_et_al_2008.pdf

Rasheed et al (2008). Productivity, carbon assimilation and intraannual change in tropical reef platform seagrass communities of the Torres Strait, Northeastern Australia http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Rasheed_et_al_2008.pdf

Haywood et al (2008). Mapping and characterisation of the inter-reefal benthic assemblages of the Torres Strait, http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Haywood_et_al_2008.pdf

Harris et al (2008). Marine resources, biophysical processes, and environmental management of a tropical shelf seaway: Torres Strait, Australia – introduction to the special issue, http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Harris_et_al_2008.pdf

Campbell et al (2008). Photosynthetic responses of subtidal seagrasses to a daily light cycle in Torres Strait: A comparative study, http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Campbell_et_al_2008.pdf

Assessment & monitoring reports

The following are older reports which have now been main available

Ayling AM, Roelofs AJ, McKenzie LJ and Lee Long WJ (1997). Port of Cape Flattery benthic monitoring, Baseline survey - Wet-season (February) 1996. EcoPorts Monograph Series No. 5. Ports Corporation of Queensland, Brisbane. 67 pp. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Ayling_et_al_1997_Cape_Flattery_Feb96.pdf

Beurteaux Y and Coles R (1988). Effort trends in the north-east coast prawn trawl fishery. Queensland Department of Primary Industries Information Series QI88006. pp24.
http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Beurteaux_Coles_1988.pdf

Coles RG, Bibby JM, Mellors JE and Goeden GB (1987). Changes in commercial prawns during the 1985-86. Queensland east coast closure. Queensland Department of Primary Industries Information Series QI87001. 20pp. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Coles_et_al_1987b.pdf

Coles RG, Lee Long WJ, Mellors JE and Goeden GB (1985). An assessment of the 1985 Queensland east coast prawn trawling closure. Queensland Department of Primary Industries Information Series QI85023. 20pp. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Coles_et_al_1985.pdf

Roder CA, Lee Long WJ, McKenzie LJ and Roelofs AJ (1998). Proposed Clump Point Boat Ramp & Facilities - Review of Marine Environment Factors (seagrasses and other benthic habitats). Unpublished Report to Queensland Department of Main Roads (Queensland Department of Primary Industries) 11pp.
http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Roder_et_al_1998_Clump_Pt.pdf

Coles RG, Goeden GB, Lee Long WJ and Greenway M. (1990). An assessment of the likely effects of the proposed Trinity Point project in the marine ecology of the Cairns Harbour and foreshore. Unpublished report. Queensland Department of Primary Industries. 189pp.
http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Coles_et_al_1990.pdf

Coles RG and Lee Long WJ. (1985). Juvenile prawn biology and the distribution of seagrass prawn nursery grounds in the southeastern Gulf of Carpentaria. In. PC Rothlisberg, BJ Hill and DJ Staples Eds). Second Australian National Prawn Seminar, NPS2, Cleveland, Queensland, Australia. pp55-60.
http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Coles_Lee_Long_1985.pdf

Rasheed MA, Lee Long WJ, McKenzie LJ, Roder CA, Roelofs AJ and Coles RG (1996). 'Port of Karumba Seagrass Monitoring, Baseline Surveys - Dry-season (October) 1994 and Wet-season (March) 1995'. Ports Corporation of Queensland EcoPorts Monograph Series No 4. (PCQ, Brisbane) 49 pp.
http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Rasheed_et_al_1996.pdf

Mellors JE (Ed) (1990). Torres Strait prawn project: a review of research 1986-88. Queensland Department of Primary Industries Information Series QI90018. 138pp.
http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/meg/Mellors_1990.pdf

FROM HQ

Upcoming Seagrass-Watch Workshops

- Bowen, May 17th
- Hervey Bay, May 17-18th

To register: <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/training.html#wrkshop08>

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 Newsletter 31 (hardcopy)
- Seagrass-Watch Newsletter 30 (hardcopy)
- Seagrass-Watch Newsletter 28 (hardcopy)

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

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

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Seagrass-Watch HQ is supported by the Australian Government's Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility (Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts) represented in North Queensland by the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), the Queensland Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries and by private donations.

Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin is compiled by Len McKenzie & Rudi Yoshida.