



# Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

**8 September 2009**

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. You are free to distribute it amongst your own networks.

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## NEWS

### **Millions pledged to help save reef (Australia)**

02 September 2009, ABC Online

A new study has painted a grim picture for the future of the Great Barrier Reef off Queensland. The report by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is the most comprehensive report on the reef ever undertaken - it concentrates on the effects of climate change, pollution, coastal habitat and fishing. The report has found a rise in carbon emissions is increasing the acidity of the oceans and stunting coral growth. The report warns catastrophic damage to the reef may not be averted.

Up to 90 per cent of the pollution on the reef is from farming and the State Government wants to halve that in five years. The Queensland and federal governments have signed a new plan today to protect the Great Barrier Reef. The Commonwealth is chipping in \$200 million to help farmers voluntarily reduce their impact on the reef.

Queensland Premier Anna Bligh has told Parliament the plan is an update of an earlier agreement between the two levels of government. "Through the measures identified in the renewed reef plan, we aim by 2013 to halve the run-off of harmful nutrients and pesticides and ensure at least 80 per cent of agricultural enterprises and 50 per cent of grazing enterprises have adopted land management practices that will reduce run-off," she said.

It has also emerged that ocean temperatures on the northern Great Barrier Reef have stayed a degree above average through winter. The Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) weather monitoring stations show water temperatures have begun to rise already without having reached their average winter minimums. Climatologist Dr Janice Lough says it could signal a very bad year for coral bleaching. "Just looking at the records from the weather stations, some of them have been going for about 20 years and this year seems to be particularly unusual that some of the stations didn't get down to their usual minimum and they all seem to be starting to warm over the last week or two quite rapidly," she said. "Corals are going to be at risk round about February which is when they normally reach their maximum temperatures from coral bleaching - if we actually go into the warm summer season already warmer than usual then that's going to increase the risk of coral bleaching actually happening."

*Read more Reef Rescue MMP results in Issue 35 Seagrass-Watch News: <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/magazine.html>*

*Full report :[http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp\\_site/about\\_us/great\\_barrier\\_reef\\_outlook\\_report/full\\_report](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/about_us/great_barrier_reef_outlook_report/full_report)  
more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>*

### **Black market killing fields (Cairns, QLD, Australia)**

08 September 2009, Cairns Post

A mangrove lined beach, teeming with marine life and inaccessible by land without crossing private property, is the site of a graveyard. There are no headstones or flowers, just empty bottles, rubbish and bones. The indigenous community see the site they have dubbed "turtle graveyard", south of Port Douglas, as a serious reminder of an issue casting a shadow of shame over traditional hunters. To them, it is the obvious site of a well set-up black market trade.

Indigenous community member John Alvoen first saw the turtle graveyard two years ago when he cut through a friend's cane farm to take his children to a beach he knew about. On yesterday's visit, Mr Alvoen also found what he said were the vertebrae of a dugong - an animal the Kuku Yalanji elders banned from being hunted years ago, but was openly known to be targeted by the group. Since first seeing the graveyard, Mr Alvoen has clued on to an operation, which he said was widely known about but not acted on. He blames a lack of resources and help from the Government as reasons for not being able to tackle the lucrative business.

Mr Alvoen said the finely-tuned operation, run by out-of-towners, included at least two car loads of people, with one lot camping on the beach while another group spotlight in a tinny. They bring the turtle to the beach, where it is quickly slaughtered before shipping the meat to Yule Point where it is handed to another group, who take it away for sale. "There needs to be more policing but we don't have anyone here since the funding through parks and wildlife was cut a few years ago," he said. "While I don't agree with it, they were pretty quick to jump on the other fellas (hunting turtle at Low Isles) so I can't understand why nothing has been done about this."

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

*related articles: [Call to ban dugong hunting \(28 August 2009, Brisbane Times\)](#)*

### **Poachers pillaging dugong and turtles (Cairns, QLD, Australia)**

28 August 2009, Cairns Post

Poachers are killing dugongs and turtles near Cairns and selling the meat illegally for up to \$50 a kilogram. Rangers have also found rotting carcasses of the protected animals at the Yarrabah dump and nearby beaches south of Cairns this month. These are believed to be discarded by poachers after taking the "good meat" for sale.

Reports of the black market trade and mass killings of the animals have left Yarrabah elders reeling at the waste of food, the abuse of traditional rights and ruining sustainability for future generations. A Gunggandji clan traditional owner, who has inside knowledge of the racketeering, said the dumpings could be related to the black market trade in the Far North.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, police and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service are investigating the reports at Yarrabah. "The (authority) cannot comment any further on the specifics of these investigations," a GBRMPA spokesperson said. Department of Environment and Resource Management North Queensland Marine Parks regional manager Richard Quincey said officers found no evidence of dugong carcasses at the dump. Mr Quincey said there had been reports of dugong taken at Yarrabah over the weekend of August 15 and 16.

North Queensland Land Council chairman Terry O'Shane said traditional owners or not, "they should be prosecuted". He said residents at Yarrabah and other Aboriginal communities should "dob in" those who were involved in illegal activities. Former Yarrabah mayor Vince Mundraby said traditional owners needed to have a direct line of communication with all tiers of governments about land and sea matters. Aborigines have the right to kill limited turtle and dugong with a permit for ceremonial purposes, in recognition of a 40,000-year-old custom. The State Government's Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation 2006 lists dugongs as "vulnerable to extinction".

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

*related articles: [Call to ban dugong hunting \(28 August 2009, Brisbane Times\)](#)*

## ***Suit alleges Japan broke law in approving Futenma plan (Washington, DC, USA)***

22 August 2009, Stars and Stripes

NAHA, Okinawa — A group of Okinawans is suing the Japanese government for allegedly failing to abide by the country's environmental impact law when it approved a plan to relocate Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to Okinawa's northeastern shore. The complainants claim construction of a new airfield on the lower part of Camp Schwab, with runways reaching into Oura Bay, would endanger the threatened Okinawa dugong, a marine mammal related to the manatee.

It was the first such legal action taken in Japan against the plan to replace the Futenma air station in urban Ginowan with a new facility in rural Henoko. The lawsuit was filed Wednesday in Naha District Court. The suit challenges the Defense Ministry's April decision to accept an environmental assessment that supported the government's design for the facility.

In April, the ministry's Okinawa Defense Bureau said the assessment showed that the facility the U.S. and Japan agreed upon in 2006 met environmental impact standards. It calls for an air facility at the tip of the Henoko Peninsula with part of the V-shaped runways extending into the shallow part of Oura Bay. The leader of the group of 344 residents and Okinawa conservationists who filed suit said the assessment was a "mere formality" and did not contain the helipads and port facility that are now part of the project.

Construction is scheduled to begin next year and to be completed by 2014. U.S. and Japanese officials have said it is the key to a broader plan to realign U.S. troops in Japan and relieve what has been called the "burden" Okinawa bears for hosting 75 percent of the military facilities used solely by the U.S. in Japan. Under the realignment plan, some 8,000 Marines and their families are scheduled to move to Guam, and several Marine bases on Okinawa would close.

Opponents of the project, including officials from nearby villages and the prefectural government, have complained that the runways would be too close to Henoko Village and have called for them to be placed farther offshore. Conservationists are opposed to any new construction saying the waters are the feeding grounds for the Okinawa dugong.

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

## ***After years of red tape, Hernando Beach dredging project under way***

08 September 2009, Tampabay.com

In the works for more than a dozen years, the Hernando Beach channel dredge project has gotten under way in recent weeks, as representatives of the company hired to do the work begin to mobilize forces. The financial, environmental and legal issues that mired the project in red tape for years will soon begin to fade from memory, replaced with the anticipation of a wider, longer, deeper boating thoroughfare.

Starting soon, a company called Seagrass Recovery will begin work on several projects to restore seagrass, including repair to seagrass riddled with propeller scars in an area between Jenkins Creek and Bayport, areas that later will be restricted for motor boats.

Those tasks are mitigation for seagrass that will be adversely affected when the channel is lengthened and are required as part of the county's state and federal dredging permits. The actual dredging is scheduled to begin within the next month; the anticipated completion date is in February.

*Full story and source: <http://www.tampabay.com/news/localgovernment/after-years-of-red-tape-herando-beach-dredging-project-under-way/1034312>*

## ***No-anchor zone hold-up at Studland hits fight to save seahorse (Bournemouth, Dorset, UK)***

04 September 2009, Bournemouth Daily Echo

A conservationist says another year has been wasted in efforts to protect a Purbeck seahorse habitat. Volunteer Dorset diver Steve Trehella has been lobbying authorities to protect the eelgrass – also known as seagrass – in Studland Bay, home to the largest breeding seahorse colony in the country.

Seabed owner Crown Estates has commissioned a survey into the damage, which includes a voluntary no-anchor zone in the bay. It was meant to come into effect earlier this year, but as autumn nears, Mr Trehella says it is now too late to gather any meaningful data. He said the survey would only prove what was already known – that anchors damage the eelgrass – and added: "It's another year of the seahorses not being protected that's been and gone."

Crown Estates and Natural England have appointed SeaStar Survey to carry out the examination, where experts will photograph the no-anchor zone and compare data from that to a zone where boats can anchor.

*Full story and source:*

*[http://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk/news/4580039.No\\_anchor\\_zone\\_hold\\_up\\_at\\_Studland\\_hits\\_fight\\_to\\_save\\_seahorse/](http://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk/news/4580039.No_anchor_zone_hold_up_at_Studland_hits_fight_to_save_seahorse/)*

## **Bahamas set to ban catch and sale of sea turtles (AAP)**

01 September 2009, The Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Soups, stews and pies flavored with chunks of sea turtle meat will soon be illegal across the 700 islands of the Bahamas, environmental activists and scientists said Sunday. Despite opposition from many fishermen, the Bahamas has amended fisheries laws to give full protection to all sea turtles found in the Atlantic archipelago's waters by banning the harvest, possession, purchase and sale of the endangered reptiles, including their eggs. The new rules take effect Tuesday.

Previously, the Bahamian government permitted harvesting of all species of sea turtles except the hawksbill. Flesh had been used by restaurants and shells for tourist keepsakes despite turtles' status as endangered species. It's impossible to gauge how many green turtles, loggerheads and other types were slaughtered each year in the Bahamas, but activists say counts of shells found in marina markets and information from fishermen indicate the haul was hefty.

"It has been an unrelenting catch," Karen Bjorndal, who has long studied marine turtle populations at the University of Florida's Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research, said in a phone interview. Bjorndal said the Bahamas' shallow seagrass beds and reefs are prime foraging grounds for the big, slow turtles, so the fishing ban will help spur the regional recovery of the creatures, which are also threatened by pollution and development on beaches where they lay eggs.

*Full story and source:* [http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5ic3am-arggwC8or0tvqf\\_xlhjv7wD9ADGENGO](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5ic3am-arggwC8or0tvqf_xlhjv7wD9ADGENGO)

## **Higher learning (USA)**

29 August 2009, TheChronicleHerald.ca

Researchers at Dalhousie University have taken to the air to get more information on what's underwater. Jeff Barrell, a PhD student in the oceanography department, and his faculty supervisor have equipped a four-metre-long blimp with a digital camera to take high-resolution photographs of seagrass meadows, areas typically about five-metres deep that buffer shorelines.

The \$5,000 DalBlimp — in essence, a helium balloon operated by remote control — is cheaper, offers greater detail and more stability for photographing than a plane or satellite. It can help map seagrass meadows, such as those that line McNabs Island and Eastern Passage, providing important details on the effect of water currents and other changes to the sensitive areas, Mr. Barrell said.

Researchers have typically used planes to monitor such areas, but the level of detail was lacking. Sea level is too close for any kind of survey and the glare of the water surface interferes. Mr. Barrell recently returned from using the DalBlimp on Baffin Island and plans to get it airborne for further research locally again this fall.

*Full story and source:* <http://thechronicleherald.ca/Front/1139884.html>

## **Ramp rage as amphibious boat tour 'damages seagrass' (NT, Australia)**

25 August 2009, Northern Territory News

The Territory's only amphibious tour boat is damaging the seagrass that has drawn dugongs back to a Darwin beach, a city council alderman said yesterday. John Bailey said the 10m-long Reggie was churning up the seabed near Vestey's boat ramp. He said the former Vietnam War freight vessel was using the beach when the tide was too low.

NT Government environmental scientist Peter Bannister said: "I cannot see any justification for damaging the sea grass in front of Mindil beaches, where dugongs can be seen, when the Ski Club boat ramp could be used instead."

Duckabout Tours owner Nathan Doble became angry when questioned about the alleged environmental damage. He said an independent report had proved Mr Bailey wrong.

*Full story and source:* [http://www.ntnews.com.au/article/2009/08/25/78491\\_ntnews.html](http://www.ntnews.com.au/article/2009/08/25/78491_ntnews.html)

## **County awards contract for conservation (Florida, USA)**

23 August 2009, Tampa Bay Newspapers

CLEARWATER - The Board of Pinellas County Commissioners unanimously agreed on Aug. 18 to award a contract for development of a conservation management plan for Clearwater Harbor and St. Joseph Sound to Janicki Environmental Inc. of St. Petersburg.

Will Davis, director of environmental management, told the board that costs to implement the plan after it is developed were unknown. The intent of the project is to provide necessary information and a plan to improve water quality and protection for critical habitats.

Janicki proposes to use water quality data collected as of Sept. 30 and seagrass data collected through Oct. 31, as well as land use data collected through 2008. The project involves development of a historic baseline map that includes developed land uses, agriculture, upland habitats, open water, seagrass and wetlands. Janicki will map historical sea grass coverage from 1943.

*Full story and source:* [http://www.tbnweekly.com/pinellas\\_county/content\\_articles/082309\\_pco-03.txt](http://www.tbnweekly.com/pinellas_county/content_articles/082309_pco-03.txt)



## NASA Heads Out to Sea

22 August 2009, RedOrbit

NASA scientists Maury Estes and Mohammad Al-Hamdan have been seafaring in the Gulf of Mexico, and one of them grew a bit green around the gills. It's not surprising that a space agency scientist might have trouble getting his sea legs, but what was he doing out there in the surf to begin with?

At this moment, a fleet of NASA Earth-observing satellites is silently passing overhead, gathering vital information about our planet. Estes and Al-Hamdan are combining that heavenly data with local water samples to help the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, or NEP, check the health of the coast.

"We're most interested in sea grass and marine vegetation," says Al-Hamdan. "A region's plant health tells you a lot about the health of the area itself." "It's fair to say that if seagrass is in trouble, so is everything else in the area," explains Dr. Ken Heck of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab in Mobile.

According to Estes and Al-Hamdan, the way the land is used throughout the watershed influences how much fresh water flows into the salt water areas and what that fresh water contains. "So we knew we'd get environmentally valuable information by looking at how the land was used in the past and how it's used now," says Al-Hamdan. "Historical NASA satellite data told us what we wanted to know."

That "heavenly" data, along with local water samples, revealed land use-related trends in water flow quality and properties like salinity, temperature, and clarity. These factors have both a literal and figurative trickle-down effect on marine plant life and therefore overall habitat health. "The work NASA's doing will help coastal resource managers direct the limited resources available for habitat conservation and restoration," says Mobile Bay NEP Director Roberta Swann. "It will help us focus restoration efforts where they're most needed and most likely to succeed."

Full story and source: [http://www.redorbit.com/news/science/1741323/nasa\\_heads\\_out\\_to\\_sea/](http://www.redorbit.com/news/science/1741323/nasa_heads_out_to_sea/)

## CONFERENCES

### **CERF 2009 (Oregon, USA, 1 -5 November 2009)**

Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation Conference (CERF) will host a seagrass program titled, "Seagrass Ecosystem Health in a Global Perspective". Seagrass Ecosystem Health in a Global Perspective will include four half day sessions:

- Seagrass Physiological Stress: In Sickness and in Health (SCI-108)
- Seagrass Assessment: Think Globally, Monitor Locally (SCI-105)
- Seagrass Ecological Health: Diagnosing the Canary (SCI-106)
- Seagrass Management and Policy: Proactive Sustainability (SCI-107)

More information: <http://erf.org/cerf2009/>

### **ICSED2009 (Trang, Thailand, 2 – 4 December 2009)**

International Conference on Seagrass Ecology and Dugong 2009: "*Rehabilitation & Sustainability*"

The conference will focus on current seagrass ecology issues and sustainable small-scale seagrass fisheries. The conference will contribute to the resolution of important issues which are threatening to both humans and seagrass aquatic organisms. The attendees are expected to share a viewpoint of global seagrass management based on their own backgrounds and experience. Conference topics will include:

1. seagrass biodiversity and ecosystem functioning
2. consequences of seagrass biodiversity change
3. conservation of seagrass biodiversity and dugong
4. integrated coastal management and governance mechanisms

Important dates:

30 September 2009: Deadline for abstract submission

31 October 2009: Deadline for full paper submission

15 October 2009: Deadline for early registration

More information: <http://icsed2009.rmutsv.ac.th/index.html>

## GALLERY

### **Broome, WA (Australia): 23 - 24 August 2009** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

*Seagrass-Watch HQ visited Broome in late August through the support of Environs Kimberly to conduct Level 1 training. It has been two years since Seagrass-Watch last visited Broome and conducted training.*

### **Singapore: 21 - 24 August 2009** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

*The shore below Tanjong Rimau is Sentosa's last resort for the corals and seagrasses that used to grow all around Singapore's largest southern island. To get data on the extent and health of the shore's seagrasses shore over the seasons, TeamSeagrass monitors this narrow stretch of sand and rubble that straddles the island's natural cliffs and a sloping seawall.*

### **Torres Strait, Qld (Australia): 31 July - 22 August 2009** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

*The sense of achievement at the end of monitoring this site is always paramount, as it is not an easy site to monitor due to soft sediments, and tasking addition problems due to 7 species present in some quadrats.*

# FROM HQ

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

**Seagrass-Watch News Issue 37** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/magazine.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>

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

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

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