



Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

13 January 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

Seagrass meadows monitored (Queensland, Australia)

7th January 2009, RRRC Media Release

Shallow seagrass meadows in Trinity Bay, off the coast of Cairns, have been identified as one of three likely trouble spots in Queensland for these important marine plants. Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC) chief executive officer Sheriden Morris said that a recent preliminary study and a seagrass monitoring program were important components of ensuring that the seagrass meadows were used and managed sustainably.

"Ongoing long-term monitoring programs are essential because they allow managers to detect changes in the health of the resource – in this case, seagrasses – and then, if necessary, adapt management practices to improve health," Sheriden said.

The state Government's Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries Seagrass-Watch program leader Mr Len McKenzie said monitoring results indicate that seagrasses in the Cairns region are relatively healthy, however in locations such as Townsville the intertidal seagrasses have declined - a possible consequence of poor water quality and disturbance.

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

Read more on Marine Monitoring Program in Seagrass-Watch News: Issues 35. <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/newsletters.html>

'Mermaid' rescued in Philippines (Gland, Switzerland)

06 January 2009, WWF International

Two brave fishermen from the Philippines began the year by saving the life of a trapped dugong or sea cow, the ancient sea mammal generally credited with being the origin of the mermaid myth. On the afternoon of 1 January Henry Barlas, from the coastal barangay of Maruyogon in Puerto Princesa, noticed something unusual as he gazed at the shallow lagoon fronting his home. Less than 10 metres from shore a 2.6m long dugong lay trapped and weakened by the tide, clearly fighting for life.

Without hesitation he called his colleague Paquito Abia and with the aid of volunteers pushed the refrigerator-sized animal to safety. In the morning Barlas immediately notified both local officials and WWF-Philippines of the stranding before heading off to check on the dugong.

In the last decade WWF helped establish a Roxas-based marine-mammal rescue network which has been monitoring strandings and spearheading rescues of dugongs accidentally entangled in fishing gear. Awareness drives to protect not just dugongs, but dolphins and whales, are still conducted regularly.

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

related article: <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20090107-181869/Palawan-folk-save-stranded-8-foot-dugong>

Read more on Dugong and research in Seagrass-Watch News: Issues 35, 23, 17,15,10 and 7. <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/newsletters.html>

Indigenous rangers focus of jobs plan (Australia)

05 January 2009, Cairns Post

Indigenous communities in the Torres Strait and the Gulf will share in a \$31 million national program to create jobs as wildlife rangers. Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett announced eight Torres Strait communities would share almost \$11.3 million while the Wellesley Group of islands in the Gulf would receive about \$2.7 million as part of the Government's \$2.25 billion Caring For Country Program.

Mr Garrett said the money would be allocated over five years and would create dozens of jobs for people in community-based ranger groups providing environmental services in the Torres Strait and ongoing employment and training for rangers in the Gulf. "These are important projects which enable indigenous people to combine their traditional knowledge with modern land management practices, to better manage and protect our ecosystems in a changing climate."

The Mornington, Wellesley and Bentinck island rangers will also harvest turtle and dugongs, monitor and collect data, as well as undertake seagrass sampling and manage bird colonies.

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

To learn more about Seagrass-Watch in the Torres Strait and Wellesley Islands, visit http://www.seagrasswatch.org/torres_strait.html and Seagrass-Watch News Issue 31 December 2007. <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/newsletters.html>

Tagging seahorses (UK)

12 January 2009, by Maria McGlynn BBC News

Conservationists are concerned about the long-term survival of seahorses because the creatures live among coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves, which are among the most threatened habitats on the planet.

Project Hippocampus, based in Mar Menor, south-east Spain, has been running a programme for two years to identify and tag seahorses in an attempt to learn more about the creatures' movements and behaviour. The team uses Visible Implant Fluorescent Elastomer (VIFE), a fluorescent polymer that is biologically compatible with seahorses. The liquid is injected under the skin in a position unique to each seahorse, allowing the team to identify individuals.

The UK's Seahorse Trust hopes to secure funding to use VIFE tagging on the seahorse population found in coastal waters in southern England, in order to learn more about the unique marine animals.

Full story and source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_pictures/7796425.stm

Blind Pass dredging could force no-motor zone (Fort Myers, FL, USA)

11 January 2009, The News-Press

With construction projects in environmentally sensitive areas, for every action, there is a reaction – it's often called mitigation. The action in question is a dredging project to reopen Blind Pass; the possible reaction is a 474-acre no-motor zone at Wulfert Flats near Wulfert Keys.

Passes between barrier islands are dynamic places, and wind, waves and currents can fill them with sand; Blind Pass has been closed since April 2001. When the pass is closed, there is no tidal flushing, so water quality on the bayside declines, and fish and invertebrates move out. In early December, Energy Resources Inc. of Chesterfield, Mo., started a \$3.2 million project to reopen the pass that separates Sanibel and Captiva islands. The project is scheduled to be finished in May.

Because the project will destroy seagrass in the state's Pine Island Aquatic Preserve, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection wants the damage mitigated. One way to mitigate damage to seagrass is to create a no-motor zone nearby.

Full story and source: <http://www.news-press.com/article/20090111/ENT20/901110402/1075>

Related links: <http://www.news-press.com/article/20090101/GREEN/81231061/1075>

Bush to establish world's largest marine protection area (Australia)

06 January 2008, ABC online

US President George W Bush is to announce the creation of the world's largest marine protection area spanning some 505,000 square kilometres in the Pacific Ocean, a spokesman said. The three areas to be designated as "marine national monuments" include the Mariana Trench and northern Mariana Islands, the Rose Atoll located in American Samoa, and a chain of remote islands in the central Pacific. Establishing marine national monuments aims to ensure that certain resources are protected, such as rare fish and bird species, coral reefs and underwater active volcanoes, a top Bush aide on the environment said.

Collectively, the three areas will nudge out the Phoenix Island Protected Area, established in 2008 by the South Pacific nation of Kiribati as the world's largest protected area. They also top Mr Bush's last such announcement of a marine protection area in 2006 - the 363,000 square kilometres of Pacific Ocean near the north-western Hawaiian islands.

Full story and source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/01/06/2459959.htm>

Volunteer to survey seagrass (Sarasota, FL, USA)

06 January 2009, Sarasota Herald-Tribune

SARASOTA COUNTY -- The county is looking for volunteers to help conduct a winter seagrass survey, which runs through February.

After attending a mandatory training class, volunteers will gather information on seagrass, algae, and water clarity from various points in Sarasota's bays. Participants in the survey should have their own GPS devices and watercraft. But if you do not have that equipment, you can still volunteer and will be paired with someone.

For more information, or to volunteer, call 861-5000 and ask for Amanda Dominguez, or contact her at adomingu@scgov.net.

Full story and source: http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20090106/ARTICLE/901060382?Title=Sarasota_news_briefs

Life Returning to Dead Zone (Florida, USA)

04 January 2009, Florida

Marine life is returning to near-shore reefs that were so smothered by a devastating outbreak of red tide along Florida's central Gulf Coast in 2005 that the area became known as a "dead zone." Shallow grass flats from Fort DeSoto Park to Sarasota Bay are once again teeming with gator trout, snook and redfish three years after the massive red tide bloom wiped out the entire food chain. And scientists are working to refine technologies to predict and monitor red tides, even searching for solutions to control and lessen the impact of blooms.

Karenia brevis, the strain of red tide specific to the Gulf of Mexico and named for a Florida scientist, can kill almost everything in its path - marine mammals, fish, birds and turtles - by producing a toxin that attacks the central nervous system of these creatures.

The 2,000-square-mile dead zone, located about 10 miles offshore between Sarasota County and Hernando County, is rebounding after one of the most severe outbreaks in Florida history destroyed populations of bottom-dwelling fish like grouper and snapper, as well as corals and sponges. The destruction killed an estimated 163 sea turtles, 63 manatees, 25 dolphins, shellfish beds and tens of thousands of fish in 2005.

Full story and source: http://www.theledger.com/article/20090104/NEWS/901040350?Title=Life_Returning_to_Dead_Zone

County granted extension to appeal Midnight Pass ruling (Sarasota, FL, USA)

02 January 2009, Sarasota Herald-Tribune

The county now has until Feb. 16 to file an appeal on the state's rejection of a plan to reopen Midnight Pass. A decision on whether to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on an appeal will likely come Tuesday when the issue is expected to go before county commissioners, said County Administrator Jim Ley.

On Dec. 11, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection issued a 24-page letter containing a long list of reasons it planned to deny the county's petition to reopen the pass. The state gave the county 14 days to file its appeal. Instead, the county asked for an extension and was granted one. The county's complex \$15million plan includes dredging a new 300-foot-wide pass, transplanting seagrass and creating tidal lagoons.

Full story and source: <http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20090102/ARTICLE/901020324>

Council tackles Inman River stench (Australia)

02 January 2009, ABC Online

Victor Harbor Council says it has a 10-year plan to deal with the stench from drying effluent in the Inman River. Waste was pumped into the river until about three years ago when a waste water treatment plant was built. The council's environmental manager, Peter Bond, says SA Water is yet to solve the problem, but the council is considering several options to ease the smell.

"People that are actually catching the water before it comes down and how we can control that take of environmental flow upstream. We're also looking at the estuary and how we might improve the estuary in terms of reducing the amount of seagrass that comes upstream that causes odour through rotting seagrass," he said.

Full story and source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/01/02/2458057.htm>

Treaty lax on Gipps Lakes (Southbank, Victoria, Australia)

31 December 2008, Weekly Times Now

Australia was the first signatory to the treaty, in 1975, but has failed to inform Ramsar on the state of at least half its 65 listed wetlands, according to Ramsar's technical panel adviser and former committee chairman Max Finlayson. Mr Finlayson was particularly concerned about the Gippsland Lakes. He said the managing authority, the Gippsland Coastal Board, must stop input of nutrient from the catchment, much of it from the Macalister Irrigation District.

Originally a largely freshwater system, the Gippsland Lakes are the largest inland body of water in the hemisphere, and have suffered a algal bloom for a year as salt creeps up the lakes system from the ocean entrance. Critics say there are two key factors: greatly reduced inflows as water from the catchment is used to satisfy Melbourne, industry and agriculture, and nutrient from the irrigation district. As well, fire and flood have washed nutrient and chemicals into the system.

A Gippsland lakes fisherman claimed seagrass and native vegetation had been devastated, sandworms had disappeared, and some waterbirds failed to breed this year. Testing suggests dolphins in the Gippsland Lakes have died of mercury poisoning; a study last year showed a major tributary to the lakes had one of the highest levels of antibiotics in the world; and a 1997 study of 300 bream found every fish had high concentrations of mercury and pesticides.

Ramsar rules recommend reports be forwarded every six years, or as adverse changes occur. The last update offered on the lakes was in 1999, despite a Ramsar meeting six weeks ago, Mr Finlayson said.

Full story and source: http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/article/2008/12/31/37931_water.html

Wildlife groups ask feds to revise critical habitat zones for manatees (Naples, FL, USA)

29 December 2008, Naples Daily News

Conservation groups are petitioning the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to revise the boundaries of critical habitat for the endangered Florida manatee in Southwest Florida. The new boundaries are part of a statewide proposal to update the critical habitat designation for the manatee for the first time in more than 30 years.

Full story and source: <http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2008/dec/29/wildlife-groups-ask-feds-revise-critical-habitat-z/>

Nine Additional Fishing Sanctuaries to be Established (Jamaica)

Government of Jamaica, Jamaica Information Service

Cabinet has approved the establishment of nine fishing sanctuaries in seven critical areas around the island's coastline, to complement the existing two sanctuaries. The two existing sanctuaries are located at Bogue Island Lagoon, in Montego Bay, St. James, and Bowden Inner Harbour, in St. Thomas, while the new sanctuaries will be established within the Portland Bight in St. Catherine and Clarendon; Black River Bay, St. Elizabeth; Bluefields Bay, Westmoreland; Orange Bay, Hanover; Montego Bay, St. James; Discovery Bay, St. Ann, and Oracabessa Bay, St. Mary.

Explaining the selection criteria for the sanctuaries, Dr. Tufton informed that, "the area must have important ecological characteristics of mangrove wetlands neighbouring a shallow bay area, with some seagrass coverage. These areas are known to be important nursery grounds for many and perhaps, most juvenile reef fish species. The inclusion of reefs will allow for the protection of critical growth and feeding habitat for the species being protected by the sanctuaries."

Full story and source: http://www.jis.gov.jm/agriculture/html/20081224T090000-0500_17903_JIS_NINE_ADDITIONAL_FISHING_SANCTUARIES_TO_BE_ESTABLISHED.asp

MONITORING REPORTS

Seagrass-Watch HQ has been busy over the New Year updating web pages for each of the monitoring regions with the latest available data. Recently updated pages include:

Queensland, Australia

- Bowen <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/bowen.html>
- Cairns <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/cairns.html>
- Cooktown <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/cooktown.html>
- Gladstone <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Gladstone.html>
- Mission Beach <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/MissionBeach.html>
- Napranum <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Napranum.html>
- Shoalwater Bay http://www.seagrasswatch.org/shoalwater_bay.html
- Townsville <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/townsville.html>
- Torres Strait http://www.seagrasswatch.org/torres_strait.html

Western Australia

- Broome <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/WA.html>

Papua New Guinea <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/png.html>

Singapore <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Singapore.html>

SEAGRASS-WATCH WORKSHOPS 2009

Australia

Cooktown, March 9-10 *For more information :* <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/training.html#wrkshop09>

Whitsunday, April 4-5 *For more information:* <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/training.html#wrkshop09>

Asia

Singapore, May 02 -03 *For more information:* <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/training.html#wrkshop09>

Bali, May 08-09 *For more information:* <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/training.html#wrkshop09>

GALLERY

Far North Queensland: 10 - 13 January 2009 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

With Tropical Cyclone Charlotte gaining strength in the Gulf of Carpentaria (north west Queensland) and the development of the monsoon trough, it was a challenging first monitoring event for 2009 at the start of the Wet season. It was also Richard Unsworth's first monitoring event as the newest member of Seagrass-Watch HQ. With heavy rain settling in, estimating seagrass abundance was challenging at Green Island. Nevertheless, seasonally high abundances were observed. The seagrasses at Yule Point have so far fared well and similarly, seasonally high abundances were observed. Large seed banks were also recorded, suggesting the meadow will be fairly resilient to any losses experienced over the coming wet season. A surprising find was large numbers of dead sea cucumbers, possible victims of the large volumes of freshwater dumped on the region. Most of the animals were around 10cm in length - possibly *Holothuria scabra* juveniles which are common on these meadows.

Townsville, Queensland: 10 - 12 January 2009 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Midnight sampling and wild weather make for a challenging start to 2009 monitoring in Townsville.

Bushland Beach, 11 January 2009

There were 8 brave women that sampled at BB1, led by Jacky from Northern Beaches Rotary, in the early hours of Sunday morning. We had a little shower of rain but then a full moon shone down on us. Seagrass cover was on the rise and seeds were found. Thank you for the good night.

Magnetic Is, MI2, 11 January 2009

We were able to monitor MI2 during the day, but had to work quickly as the tide was only bootie height for about an hour, before it started coming back in. As always, this site is dominated by *Cymodocea serrulata* but there was an increase in *Halodule uninervis* recorded.

Magnetic Is, MI1, 12 January 2009

This was our last night time sampling and it was the wildest one, as we had wild winds and showers of rain to contend with. This site is dominated by wide and thin variations of *Halodule uninervis* and it was nice to find a few seeds all at the 50 m end of the transects. Thank you to Carla who came out to both of the Magnetic Island monitorings.

Chek Jawa (Singapore): 10 January 2009 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Our first monitoring session for 2009! And a small team head off for Chek Jawa on a breezy day. Most of Chek Jawa is covered with *Halophila ovalis* and *Halodule* sp. Shufen and Siti also found flowering *Halophila ovalis*. But what was most delightful was the luxuriant and broad expanses of the beautiful *Halophila spinulosa*. I made a quick round of the Northern sand bar, specifically to see how the *Halophila beccarii* was doing. There were only a few patches of these tiny but tough seagrasses. Shufen checked the patch nearer the boardwalk and they too were being overgrown by the more abundant *Halophila ovalis*. Does *Halophila beccarii* do better when there is an influx of freshwater? *Hmm...*there's still a lot we need to find out about our seagrasses. *Text: Team Seagrass-Singapore.*

FROM HQ

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

Seagrass-Watch News Issue 35 <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>

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.