



Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

16 December 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.

IN THIS BULLETIN

NEWS	1
Manatees dying at a record pace (USA)	1
CLIMATE CHANGE: Coastal Carbon Sinks in Dire Need of Protection (Copenhagen).....	2
Indigenous group offers reef management advice (Australia).....	2
Qatar Shell GTL joins hands with Ministry of Environment to rehabilitate seagrass (Qatar).....	2
Port Geographe beachfront closed because of Hydrogen Sulphide levels (Australia).....	3
Hatoyama says plan to move Futemma base to Nago still 'alive' (USA).....	3
Headless dugong brought ashore (Hervey Bay, QLD, Australia).....	3
Residents worry wastewater is to blame for seagrass decline (USA)	3
Our green lawns not worth loss of seagrass beds in gulf (USA)	4
Everglades National Park wants pilot project to protect seagrass (Orlando,FL,USA).....	4
Green grass for Phuket sea cows (Phuket,Thailand)	5
GALLERY	5
Suva (Fiji): 14 November 2009.....	5
Gladstone (Qld, Australia): 01-05 November 2009	5
Urangan (Qld, Australia): 15 October 2009.....	5
CONFERENCES	5
World Seagrass Conference & ISBW9 (Thailand, November 2010).....	5
FROM HQ.....	6
Frequently Asked Questions	6
Seagrass-Watch News Issue 38	6
Seagrass-Watch Shop	6
Virtual Herbarium	6
Giveaways.....	6
Future sampling dates.....	6
Handy Seagrass Links	6

Please note: links to sources were active on date of publication. Some sources remove links periodically.

NEWS

Manatees dying at a record pace (USA)

12 December, Florida Today

A record 105 manatees died in Brevard County this year, almost twice as many as the next highest county and a quarter of the manatees to perish statewide. Brevard has more habitat; therefore, more manatees tend to live and die here than in any other Florida county. But biologists are worried about the high numbers that keep dying young. Along the Space Coast, almost half died within a year of birth.

Statewide, 413 sea cows have died this year, putting the species on pace to break the previous record of 417 deaths, set in 2006. Brevard's total surpassed the previous county record of 87 manatee deaths, also set in 2006, by 20 percent.

Boaters against go-slow manatee zones attribute this year's high death toll to a growing manatee population. The record deaths came in the same year the state counted a record 3,802 manatees statewide. The boaters say slow zones do little to protect a species they see thriving. Manatee conservationists chalk up the statewide deaths from boat strikes and record overall deaths as proof that the species is in peril.

Full story and source: <http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20091212/NEWS01/912120314/1006/Manatees+dying+at+a+record+pace>

CLIMATE CHANGE: Coastal Carbon Sinks in Dire Need of Protection (Copenhagen)

12 December 2009, Reuters AlertNet

What would it be like if the air we breathe was 30 percent more acidic? The oceans are already 30 percent more acidic, and on their way to becoming 120 percent more acidic in 50 years at the current rates of carbon dioxide emissions. Acidification is already affecting coral reefs, algae and plankton, the base of many marine food chains, according to a new report released here by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

"In the last 10 years, the growth of coral reefs in many areas has declined 15 percent," said Carl Gustaf Lundin, head of the IUCN's Global Marine Programme. Meanwhile, IUCN researchers have now documented that coastal marine habitats like mangroves, salt marshes and seagrass meadows may store 50 times the amount of carbon that tropical forests do on a per hectare basis. "Seagrass meadows may well be more effective in sequestering carbon than forests," Lundin said. However, two-thirds of seagrass meadows near inhabited areas have already been lost due to pollution and siltation. "Investments in protecting coastal ecosystems might be a very cost-effective way to sequester carbon," he said.

Countries are largely unaware of this fact and marine habitats are not part of any international or national climate accounting systems. The IUCN believes it is urgent that the marine equivalent of a Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) scheme be created to safeguard these coastal carbon sinks. "Future generations will judge us harshly if we don't act urgently," Lundin said. "They will understand that we did not have to make any large adjustments and that there were lots of practical things we could do right now." "This is a global problem. We can't resolve this with individual actions or countries," he emphasised.

Full story and source: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/lps/ae26b2ab96aedb0d46dea63d4005ec32.htm>

Related story: <http://www.environmentalleader.com/2009/11/17/oceans-may-trap-more-carbon-than-forests/>

Read more on Carbon sequestration in Issue 36 of Seagrass-Watch News magazine: <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/magazine.html>

Indigenous group offers reef management advice (Australia)

11 December 2009, ABC Regional Online

A newly established Indigenous group has met the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) in Townsville to provide advice on how best to manage 'sea country'. The Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee aims to provide GBRMPA with strategies to work with the 70 traditional owner groups across the Great Barrier Reef.

Committee chairwoman Melissa George says the new partnership could help to inform the wider community about the ties traditional owners have to sea country. "I think that the more work we do and the more collaboration that we do across sectors and also with the authority and other departments, then ... that's only just going to get better, people's knowledge base will increase so therefore ... they'll be able to make decisions on information that is true and correct," she said.

Ms George says one joint activity will be the Sea Country guardian schools program. She says the curriculum is being designed for Indigenous primary school children in six communities including Palm Island, Cooktown and Lockhart. "Talking about ... access to sea country, access to resources, species management, Seagrass-Watch, a whole range of activities that the authority already undertakes but making it appropriate so that Indigenous kids specifically can pick it up," she said.

Full story and source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/12/11/2768785.htm?site=tropic>

Qatar Shell GTL joins hands with Ministry of Environment to rehabilitate seagrass (Qatar)

09 December 2009, The Peninsula

Qatar Shell GTL, with the support of the Ministry of Environment (MoE), is working on a master plan to rehabilitate seagrass in its off-shore project. This is to compensate the damage caused by the submarine pipelines to the sensitive seabed grass. A top official of the MoE told The Peninsula that the project would be the third major attempt to rehabilitate seagrass in Qatar after the New Doha International Airport (NDIA) and Ras Laffan Industrial City (RLIC) did similar projects successfully.

"Recently, The New Doha International Airport (NDIA) replanted and rehabilitated a vast area of seagrass along the north and south boundaries of the platform. Of late, the Ras Laffan Industrial City (RLIC) also carried out a similar project. Both the projects have been proved highly successfully", Yousef Al Hamar, Acting Director, Environmental Assessment Department, MoE said. Seagrass in Qatar covers large marine areas off Messaed Industrial City (MIC), Ras Abu Fontas desalination plant area, Simaismah and between Ras Ushairaj and Dukhan, he said.

Robert Munster, vice president, HSSE, Pearl GTL project said the workshop is a precursor to the massive project the Shell GTL is working on for the rehabilitation of seagrass. The project area of Qatar Shell GTL has the presence of seagrass as well as coral. There is a massive presence of seagrass along the 250 meter from the shoreline to the offshore. The width of the corridor has been estimated nearly 70 metre, he said.

Full story and source:

http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/Display_news.asp?section=Local_News&subsection=Qatar+News&month=December2009&file=Local_News2009120945525.xml

Related story: http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=330913&version=1&template_id=36&parent_id=16

Port Geographe beachfront closed because of Hydrogen Sulphide levels (Australia)

09 December 2009, Busselton Dunsborough Mail

Parts of the Port Geographe beachfront will be closed, because of potential health risks from hydrogen sulphide (H₂S) generated from decaying seagrass. However, the Department of Health (DOH) has downplayed the health effects of H₂S emissions at Port Geographe. The closures are a result of a recommendation from the DOH, which was distributed to Port Geographe stakeholders two weeks ago.

In a letter, obtained by the Mail, the director of the environmental health directorate Jim Dodds said that areas affected by H₂S should be closed to the public. "Although the likely health impacts at this sort of level may not be great, the severity of the problem is not clear and could vary with circumstances, especially since the seagrass problem this year differs from that in previous years. "DOH strongly recommends that access to the area affected by H₂S bubbles be restricted."

However, the Shire of Busselton maintains the levels of hydrogen sulphide in the past two weeks are much lower than the readings the DOH has received. The shire's director of community infrastructure Oliver Darby said: "The monitoring undertaken to-date this season shows that the H₂S levels at residential premises in the area are at safe levels and that exceedence of recommended levels is confined to the western beach in the area of accumulated seagrass.

Full story and source: <http://www.busseltonmail.com.au/news/local/news/general/port-geographe-beachfront-closed-because-of-hydrogen-sulphide-levels/1700639.aspx>

Hatoyama says plan to move Futenma base to Nago still 'alive' (USA)

04 December 2009, istockAnalyst.com (press release)

Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama said Friday the plan under a Japanese-U.S. agreement to relocate a U.S. military airfield within Okinawa Prefecture is still valid, but at the same time acknowledged that he has instructed some of his Cabinet ministers to consider a new location for the transfer. "Needless to say, Henoko is alive," Hatoyama told reporters, referring to the plan to move U.S. Marine Corps Futenma air station to a new facility to be built at the Marines' Camp Schwab in the Henoko district of Nago, farther north on the southern island of Okinawa.

Under the 2006 agreement, the Futenma facility, which sits in a crowded residential area in Ginowan, southern Okinawa, will be replaced by a new air facility to be built in the less populated city of Nago by 2014, while 8,000 Marines will be transferred from Okinawa to the U.S. territory of Guam. Regarding the plan to move Futenma's air operations to Guam, an idea that has recently been floated, Hatoyama denied Friday that it was his idea and reacted cautiously to it. "We need to consider whether it is appropriate to transfer everything to Guam from the viewpoint of (maintaining) the deterrence provided by the United States," he said.

Meanwhile, about 50 environmental groups such as the WWF Japan, Greenpeace Japan and the Nature Conservation Society of Japan, called on Japan and the United States on Friday to scrap their existing plan to move the heliport functions of the Futenma base to Nago, saying it could devastate rich marine ecosystems in the planned new airfield construction site. The area is home to the dugong, an endangered species of marine mammal, and a vast coral reef. The dugong is recognized as a natural treasure by the Japanese government and is also protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. A U.S. environment group also submitted a letter to the White House on Thursday, urging President Barack Obama to cancel the plan to transfer the Futenma functions to Nago in order to protect the dugong.

Full story and source: <http://www.istockanalyst.com/article/viewStockNews/articleid/3686906>

Headless dugong brought ashore (Hervey Bay, QLD, Australia)

04 December 2009, Fraser Coast Chronicle

Beach-goers at Torquay yesterday were treated to a more than unsightly scene when a decapitated dugong was brought ashore. Aquavue Café staff and marine mammal expert Yvonne Miles towed the dead sea creature to the Torquay boat ramp after spotting it floating near the Urangan Pier.

Aquavue Café owner Larry Burch said the dugong was thought to have been the same one seen bobbing in the Mary River last week. "We are unsure of the cause of the death," he said. "There is no evidence of a boat strike, however other marine species have had a few meals on the carcass which makes it more difficult to ascertain."

The dugong's stomach had been ripped open and its head was completely gone. The carcass was removed from the sand by the early afternoon and was buried with the help of Fraser Coast Regional Council staff.

Full story and source: <http://www.frasercoastchronicle.com.au/story/2009/12/04/headless-dugong-brought-ashore/>

Residents worry wastewater is to blame for seagrass decline (USA)

01 December 2009, Corpus Christi Caller Times

Scientists, Rockport residents and community leaders have been trying to find out what is harming Little Bay's seagrass population since it began declining around 2004. The Aransas County Navigation District even hosted a symposium on the subject in April 2008.

Tommy Moore, who owns tourism boat tour company Rockport Birding and Kayak Adventures, is convinced that an overloading of nutrients is to blame. The chemical nitrogen acts like a fertilizer, causing algae to grow and block the sunlight necessary for seagrasses to grow. The answer might not be as simple as limiting nitrogen. The harmful effects of too much nitrogen on seagrass is well documented, local scientists said, but whether the chemical is to blame in Little Bay remains to be seen. Moore wants the city of Rockport to limit the amount of nitrogen compounds it releases from its wastewater treatment plant. The city is in the midst of renewing its wastewater permit from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. The permit doesn't limit the amount of nitrogen to be released.

Those are some of the possibilities scientists at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute are researching at Little Bay. Ken Dunton, an aquatic plant and ecosystem professor at the institute, is leading a study taking measurements of plant health, water quality, phytoplankton, nutrients in the sediment and water, and sunlight. The study began last spring, and the city of Rockport should receive preliminary results next spring or early summer, Dunton said.

Full story and source: <http://www.caller.com/news/2009/dec/01/residents-worry-wastewater-is-to-blame-for-sea/>

Our green lawns not worth loss of seagrass beds in gulf (USA)

02 December 2009, Tampabay.com

The Weeki Wachee River, with that spectacularly clear water and white-sand bed, is the star, the glamor-puss. Then there's the subtle beauty of the Withlacoochee River, darker and, in every sense of the word, deeper — at least after a decent rain. The appeal of the Gulf of Mexico is on the surface, up in the sunshine, blue water and fast boats. Underneath? The water is shallow off the coast, the bottom flat and drab.

That's the standard knock against the gulf, and, basically, it's all wrong, said Keith Kolasa of the Southwest Florida Water Management District, leader of a team that recently mapped seagrass beds in the gulf from the mouth of the Anclote River, in northern Pinellas County, to the Withlacoochee, on the Citrus-Levy county line. Kolasa found 380,000 acres of beds, all but about 100,000 acres of that classified as "dense." It is a natural plain, an underwater savanna, the second-largest expanse of seagrass in the country after the one that stretches in the gulf from the Florida Keys to Naples. Though documentation is spottier outside the United States, the seagrass field off our coast may be the fourth-largest in the world.

These beds have been measured twice before, in 1985 and 1999. Though improved mapping techniques make comparisons inconclusive, the best guess is that the beds are smaller and sparser than the first time they were surveyed, but bigger and healthier than a decade ago. That may be, Kolasa said, because 1999 was the year after the floods of the last major El Niño event. See, what is good for rivers — heavy rain — can be bad for seagrass beds. Runoff carries nutrients such as phosphorous and nitrogen into the gulf. These feed algae, which clouds water and blocks the sunlight grass needs to grow.

Also, the timing of Kolasa's report is perfect for environmentalists fighting the well-funded plan to allow oil drilling within a few miles of the state's shoreline — prime sea grass territory, in other words. The beaches, statewide, are the star attractions. They will be protected, according to the lawyers hired to promote the drilling plan. The seagrass beds will be overlooked, unfairly, just like always.

Full story and source: <http://www.tampabay.com/news/environment/water/our-green-lawns-not-worth-loss-of-sea-grass-beds-in-gulf/1055664>

Related story: <http://www2.tbo.com/content/2009/nov/18/seagrass-beds-growing-along-gulf-coastline-despite/news-metro/>

Everglades National Park wants pilot project to protect seagrass (Orlando,FL,USA)

28 November 2009, Orlando Sentinel

Hoping to prevent boat propellers from tearing up seagrass, Everglades National Park has proposed banning the use of outboard motors in part of Florida Bay. The Snake Bight section of the bay would be declared a pole and troll zone, where only push poles, paddles and electric trolling motors could be used. The no-motor zone would be a pilot project intended to test the effectiveness of such restrictions in protecting seagrass and wildlife habitat, while still allowing visitors to enjoy the park.

Matthew Schwartz, Everglades chairman of the Broward Group of the Sierra Club, said the experiment should show that damaged areas can recover, enhancing habitat for fish and other wildlife, improving the experience for people who fish, paddle or watch wildlife. Fishing guides, initially skeptical of the park's plans, generally support the motor ban at Snake Bight.

Dan Kimball, the park's superintendent, said in a statement that he and his staff had visited pole and troll zones elsewhere in Florida and that "the value of these zones for protecting shallow-water resources and providing better visitor use opportunities has been demonstrated." The National Park Service is accepting comments on the proposal through Monday. For more information, go to <http://www.nps.gov/ever>, click on "management," and then "park planning."

Full story and source: <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/fl-florida-bay-20091128,0,4894083.story>

Green grass for Phuket sea cows (Phuket, Thailand)

27 November 2009, Phuket Gazette

Bangkok Hospital Phuket and the Mekawanich Foundation are teaming up to produce 20,000 'effective micro-organisms' (EM) balls that will be introduced into the sea off Pa Khlok and into the fetid waters of Klong Pakbang in Patong. The project will be launch on December 19 at the Weerasatree Anusorn School in Pa Khlok. Under the plan, 10,000 EM balls will be put into the ocean to encourage the growth of seagrass off the coast of Pa Khlok. Project Manager Pareeya Jullaphong of Bangkok Hospital Phuket's Cooperate Social Responsibility (CSR) unit said statistics from the Phuket Marine Biological Center (PMBC) at Cape Panwa show there are only 220 dugong left in Thai waters, and only about 20 in Phuket. It is hoped the EM balls will encourage seagrass growth in the area and spur an increase in dugong numbers there, she said.

Makawanich Foundation President Nonthalee Makawanich, also owner of Siri Hotel on Yaowarat Road in Phuket City, said EM balls are effective both as a fertilizer and as a way to treat wastewater. The balls are formed by hand and are formulated to slowly dissolve in water. One ball consists of one part powdered rice bran, one part cow dung, two parts soil mixed together with a special EM solution, Ms Nonthalee said. EM solutions are typically blends of anaerobic organisms such as lactic acid bacteria, purple bacteria and yeast. Another 10,000 EM balls will be thrown into the stretch of Klong Pakbang in Patong at 2pm the same day. The balls will be put in at 10 different locations along the filthy klong, including the stretch that runs behind Jungceylon. "The water there is in very bad condition, very smelly and dirty. If the EM balls can help treat it, perhaps Patong Mayor Pian Keesin will offer us a budget to continue the project in the long term," Ms Nonthalee said.

The PMBC's Kanjana Adulyanukosol, Thailand's leading dugong researcher, said there was little proven scientific evidence to prove the long-term effectiveness of EM balls, either for wastewater treatment or as a fertilizer for sea grass. A thorough monitoring regime would be needed to determine if the scheme is showing positive results, she said. As a means of wastewater treatment, there have been some cases of rapid improvement in water quality over small areas, with dirty water quickly becoming clear. In these cases the EM balls effectively change organic matter to inorganic, she said. However, the only long-term solution to wastewater problems of the kind Patong is facing is to reduce the pollution at the source, she said.

Full story and source: <http://www.phuketgazette.net/archives/articles/2009/article8050.html>

GALLERY

Suva (Fiji): 14 November 2009 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Did you happen to go by Suva Point on November 14th? If you did, chances are you saw groups of people walking around the flats. These were students from International School Suva and the University of the South Pacific. The students, with the assistance of Posa Skelton, were monitoring the seagrass at Nasese.

We also conducted seed coring. With continued monitoring we hope that a more accurate picture of the environment of the Suva seagrass meadows can be made. Text by Philip Kreutzer- Yr 7 (International School Suva)

Gladstone (Qld, Australia): 01-05 November 2009 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Pelican Banks: GH3 & GH4: 01 November 2009

Fishermans Landing: FL1 & FL2: 02 November 2009

West Wiggins Is: WW1: 04 November 2009

Facing Is: FH1: 05 November 2009

Urangan (Qld, Australia): 15 October 2009 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

CONFERENCES

World Seagrass Conference & ISBW9 (Thailand, November 2010)

A World Seagrass Conference (WSC) and the 9th International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW9) will take place in southern Thailand in November, 2010. The region features fascinating seagrass ecosystems; Phuket is a world-renowned diving area and Trang has Thailand's largest seagrass meadows. Both the WSC and ISBW9 will be hosted by Prince of Songkla University, Southern Thailand.

World Seagrass Conference (WSC) (Phuket, 21–25 November, 2010)

Open to all and will include invited plenary lectures and oral and poster presentations. The expected cost for WSC is US\$200 which includes registration, lunches, two dinners and a half-day field trip to the seagrass meadow in Phuket (hotel and travel are separate).

9th International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW9) (Trang, 27–30 November, 2010)

ISBW9 will follow the WSC and consist of a smaller group of participants, including both international seagrass experts and regional scientists and practitioners, to address problems of seagrass conservation and restoration, which so far are little known across Southeast Asia and South Asia. The expected cost for the workshop is US\$350, which includes travel to Trang from Phuket, lunches, two dinners and a full day excursion to the nearby seagrass meadow (again, hotel and travel separate).

If you are interested in WSC and/or ISBW9, please respond by filling out the short **Call for Interest** form available from <http://isbw.seagrassonline.org/isbw9/>

Important Dates for the WSC and ISBW9

March 2010	Abstract Submission Deadline
June 2010	Notification of Abstract Acceptance for Oral or Poster Presentations, Updated Programme
July 2010	Registration Closes
August 2010	Final Programme Announcement
21–25 November 2010	WSC in Phuket, Southern Thailand
27–30 November 2010	ISBW-9 in Trang, Southern Thailand

FROM HQ

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

Seagrass-Watch News Issue 38 <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>

DISCLAIMER

News articles posted as a free community service for the purposes of non-commercial education, research and study; review and the reporting of news; and archived for reference of students and researchers as a 'fair dealing' activity under Australian Copyright Law.

Seagrass-Watch HQ does not guarantee, and accepts no legal liability whatsoever arising from or connected to the accuracy, reliability, currency or completeness of any material contained in this bulletin. 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. This bulletin is not a substitute for independent professional advice and users should obtain any appropriate professional advice relevant to their particular circumstances. The material in this bulletin may include the views or recommendations of third parties, which do not necessarily reflect the views of Seagrass-Watch HQ (or those of the Queensland Government) or indicate its commitment to a particular course of action.

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), Fisheries Queensland (part of the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation) and by private donations.

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