



# Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

**16 June 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

### **Partnership improves species management on Great Barrier Reef (Sydney, New South Wales, Australia)**

06 June 2009, Power Boat - World

Dugongs and marine turtles in the Cape York area will be better protected thanks to an innovative partnership between marine managers, Traditional Owners and researchers. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), in conjunction with James Cook University (JCU) and the Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility (MTSRF), are holding a three-day spatial closures workshop in Cairns with Traditional Owners from the east coast of Cape York.

James Cook University dugong expert Professor Helene Marsh said the Cape York Turtle and Dugong Spatial Closures Workshop aimed to work with Traditional Owners to map out a clear way forward for protecting dugongs and turtles in the area. 'We hope to get a really good picture of the current status of dugong and turtle populations in the area and use scientific and traditional knowledge to help develop effective strategies to protect and manage these animals' she said.

The Traditional Owner groups represented at the meeting are from the east coast of Cape York and include Gudang, Yadhagana, Wuthathi, Kuuku Ya'u, Kanthanumpun, Uutaalgnunu Umpila, Guugu Yimithirr, Kuku Yalanji and Kaurareg.

Sheriden Morris from the Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility said the workshop demonstrated the importance of collaborative relationships to help protect the marine environment. 'This is a great partnership between Traditional Owners, scientific researchers and management bodies towards a common goal of protecting threatened species. We're pleased to be part of a project that is delivering meaningful outcomes.'

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

### ***Bleached seagrass washing ashore, perplexing scientists (Sarasota, FL, USA)***

*05 June 2009, Sarasota Herald-Tribune*

Unprecedented amounts of dead, bleached seagrass, resembling vermicelli noodles or soft white straw, are washing ashore in clumps from Siesta Key south to Naples. The phenomenon baffles scientists, who speculate that turbulent weather several weeks ago broke the grasses loose from the bottom of the Caribbean or the Gulf of Mexico. The blades then likely circulated in a gyre for weeks, getting bleached white by the mixture of sun and salt.

No one knows why so much grass accumulated and scientists who keep tabs on seagrass happenings around the globe said they could think of no similar event elsewhere. Seagrass blades commonly wash ashore, along with seaweed, egg casings, tiny crustaceans, and other debris. But usually they wash ashore green and in rather small quantities.

The grasses are harmless and so bleached that they do not produce an odor. No roots are present among the grass blades, indicating that a mass die-off of seagrass is unlikely. "A lot of the beds as they produce new leaves the old ones sort of float to the surface," said Loren Coen, lab director at the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, which first identified the grasses on Monday as manatee grass, also known as *Syringodium*. "Unless somewhere there are large areas of *Syringodium* that are completely gone, we're assuming it's just turnover."

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

*Full story and source: <http://www.news-press.com/article/20090602/NEWS0109/906020344/1075>*

*Related article: <http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2009/jun/01/beaches-inundated-gobs-manatee-grass/>*

### ***Port, feds working to restore homes' coastal barrier (San Diego, CA, USA)***

*13 June 2009, San Diego Union Tribune*

The San Diego Unified Port District is working with federal engineers to help end the tale of two Coronado bay-front neighbors who created a small beach by removing rocks in front of their homes, violating environmental law in the process. Deputy Port Attorney Leslie Fitzgerald said the homeowners are awaiting Army Corps of Engineers approval to replace the rocks known as riprap, and that the port has been involved in negotiating and facilitating that approval.

The Army Corps wants a detailed plan on how the owners will restore eel grass beds it says were damaged when the rocks were removed. Without the plan, the Army Corps will not issue a permit allowing the owners to move forward.

Richard Opper, an attorney for the owners, said the homeowners have been working to comply with Army Corps officials, but several eel grass plans have been rejected. He said the homeowners finally agreed to replant all the eelgrass in the area. While they didn't feel responsible for the condition of other eelgrass beds, they agreed to replant it just to get the permit, Opper said.

Fitzgerald said the owners also are required to remove the part of the concrete-block wall's footing that was built on state tidelands and pay penalties.

*Full story and source: <http://www3.signonsandiego.com/stories/2009/jun/13/1s13riprap213213-port-feds-working-restore-homes-/?metro&Index=115942>*

### ***Minister applauds Pelican Lagoon projects (Kingscote, South Australia, Australia)***

*14 June 2009, The Islander*

Environment and Conservation Minister Jay Weatherill visited Pelican Lagoon while on Kangaroo Island to see the results of environmental projects that are protecting the lagoon and surrounding areas.

Mr Weatherill also was briefed on seagrass monitoring by the Kangaroo Island NRM board, as well as its Birds on the Beach - Community Shorebird monitoring project.

*Full story and source: <http://www.theislanderonline.com.au/news/local/news/general/minister-applauds-pelican-lagoon-projects/1513415.aspx>*

### ***Boaters need to steer clear of nesting, seagrass areas (Corpus Christi, TX, USA)***

*11 June 2009, Corpus Christi Caller Times*

Texas developed a comprehensive seagrass preservation plan about 10 years ago. This week, some 150 mostly biologists from government, academia, private and non-profit organizations are in town to discuss this document, examine new information and to evaluate the successes and shortcomings of an ambitious conservation initiative.

It is fitting that the Coastal Bend host this workshop. Because about seven years ago, Texas Parks & Wildlife broke new ground here by adopting the Redfish Bay State Scientific Area as a way to preserve the submerged turtle grass meadows of this high traffic section of the coast. After a failed volunteer policy that recommended boaters not rip through this sensitive habitat with their outboard motors the state adopted a more aggressive measure with sharper teeth in 2006.

Now boaters within this 32,000-acre area are urged to consider the legal and environmental consequences of running through shallow flats or trying to get up on plane at certain depths. Fines can be as high as \$500 for uprooting any submerged aquatic vegetation.

*Full story and source: <http://www.caller.com/news/2009/jun/11/sikesoutdoors/>*

### **Environmentalists Release Report Card on Coastal Bays (Salisbury, MD, USA)**

*11 June 2009, WBOC TV 16*

On Monday, The Maryland Coastal Bays Program released a report card on the health of Maryland and Virginia's Atlantic coastal bays. The grades were given to six coastal bays in Worcester and Accomack counties. The overall grade for the bays was a C+. The Sinepuxent Bay scored the best with a B. The Saint Martin's River and Newport Bay scored the lowest with a D+.

The report looked at factors including seagrass, hard shell clam populations and water quality. They say one of their biggest concerns is the over-harvesting of hard shell clams. Scientists say those shell fish help to filter the bays. Run-off from septic systems, and continued population growth are also to blame for the dwindling health of some bays.

Scientists say pollution from some farming methods could be stifling sea life. But farmers say they are doing their part to keep the waterways clean.

*Full story and source: [http://www.wboc.com/Global/story.asp?S=10496734&nav=menu222\\_2](http://www.wboc.com/Global/story.asp?S=10496734&nav=menu222_2)*

### **Sea debris killing Phuket sea life: marine expert (Phuket, Thailand)**

*10 June 2009, Phuket Gazette*

A leading marine biologist has warned that the dumping of debris into the waters of Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi is harming marine species in the region.

Speaking at an event to mark the United Nation's first-ever official World Oceans Day on Monday, researcher Kanjana Adulyanukosol of the Phuket Marine Biological Center's Endangered Species Unit said that sea turtle populations were the worst affected. Marine mammals such as whales and dolphins were also suffering, said Miss Kanjana, Thailand's top expert on the country's endangered dugong population.

On the Andaman coast beaches of Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi there have recently been about 40 instances of sea creatures becoming beached. In more than 70% of these cases, the animals were hurt or killed by fishing implements or trash, especially plastic, Miss Kanjana said.

*Full story and source: <http://www.phuketgazette.net/archives/articles/2009/article7461.html>*

### **Montgomery reef protrudes off the Kimberley coast (Australia)**

*10 June 2009, NEWS.com.au*

A raging torrent of water carved this spectacular landscape off Western Australia's pristine Kimberley coast. What looks like a river, is actually a deep underwater trench knifing through Montgomery reef, in one of the most remote and spectacular unspoilt oceans in the world. Montgomery reef, sitting 20km offshore, protrudes from the surface of the water and low tides expose a deep blue trough that splits the coral formation in two. To the right, the Montgomery islands are just dots above a swirling ocean. The Kimberley area experiences the second highest tidal range in the world and the marine environment is among less than four per cent of the ocean left undamaged or not impacted by human activity.

A new report by WA's Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) states that fringing coral reef in the area rivals that of the Red Sea and is "of international significance".

But developments like the billion-dollar LNG hub proposed for James Price Point, north of Broome, threatened what makes the area so special, says Josh Coates, the Wilderness Society's Kimberley campaigner. "The fossil fuel development would require blasting and extensive and ongoing dredging impacting reefs and will impact heavily on species including Humpback whales and dugongs," Mr Coates told The Sunday Times. The report, which was developed to provide a scientific base for conserving the area, cited seagrass along the coast as being the most diversified in the world, with 25 unique species.

*Full story and source: <http://www.news.com.au/perthnow/story/0,27574,25614930-2761,00.html>*

## Reports Show Increase in Seagrass in Atlantic Coastal Bays (Salisbury, MD, USA)

08 June 2009, WBOC TV 16

In 2008, vital seagrass in coastal bays along the coast of Maryland and Virginia increased 17 percent, according to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Leaders in areas like the state and national parks on Assateague Island that surround the Sinepuxent Bay, say the health and survival of the ecosystem in that waterway are essential.

"Poor water quality influences the land and land conditions influence the water surrounding it. So they are intimately related," said Chief of Resource Management at Assateague Island National Seashore Carl Zimmerman. "The health of the bay system is just integral."

Scientists say an abundance of seagrass helps support a healthy ecosystem and is a good indicator of water quality. "It's an indicator of general well being of the health of the watershed," said Dr. Roman Jesien of the Maryland Coastal Bays Program. "The more grasses, the better the habitat and water quality."

Full story and source: <http://www.wboc.com/Global/story.asp?S=10485891&nav=MXEF>

## SEAGRASS-WATCH WORKSHOPS 2009

### Australia

Broome, WA, August 23-24 (Registration closes 17th August 09)

For more information: <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/training.html#wrkshop09>

## 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/>

## GALLERY

### Sentosa (Singapore): 10 June 2009 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

*At the crack of dawn, TeamSeagrass is out on Sentosa to monitor the seagrasses there. We have lots of first timers today. Fortunately, Sentosa is less difficult to monitor and also, there were regulars to help introduce the methods to the new team members.*

### Torres Strait (Qld, Australia): 27 May - 04 June 2009 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

*All the rangers participated in the monitoring, despite their heavy work schedules and the number of people visiting the island. Seagrass cover appeared sparser and with no obvious *Enhalus* fruits like last monitoring. Fresh wrack was very obvious along the beach. During this trip we also trialled some equipment in relation to subtidal monitoring.*

## FROM HQ

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

**Seagrass-Watch News Issue 36** <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.