



# Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

## 08 November 2010

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

### **Dugong deaths spark fears of 'rogue' Indigenous hunters (Australia)**

04 November 2010, by Kristy Sexton-McGrath, ABC Online

Traditional owners say "rogue" Indigenous hunters could be responsible for dwindling dugong numbers.

Yesterday, state and Federal Government representatives and traditional owners gathered in Cairns in far north Queensland for a discussion about the endangered animal. The Federal Opposition wants a national dugong protection plan, as well as a moratorium on traditional hunting.

Traditional owner Vince Mundraby from Yarrabah, south of Cairns, attended the meeting and says Indigenous people are concerned about the number of dugongs being killed each year. "We have rogue elements out there, Indigenous

people who have not got the right or go out without permission and do unlicensed kills," he said. "These people are known in the community, so we are looking at new ways of actually identifying those people. "The rogue element is getting worse - it's very concerning especially for a place like Yarrabah with a small community of 3,500 people. "We have a small number of 10 to 15 rogues in the community. "What we are doing is working out a process to make sure that those rogue elements are compliant."

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

*Related stories: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/11/04/3057197.htm>  
[http://www.cairns.com.au/article/2010/11/04/133691\\_local-news.html](http://www.cairns.com.au/article/2010/11/04/133691_local-news.html)  
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/11/03/3056099.htm>*

### **Calls to protect dugongs (Cairns, Australia)**

*27 October 2010, by Daniel Bateman, The Cairns Post*

Traditional owners are putting their boats between illegal hunters and dugongs in an effort to stop the endangered animals being driven to extinction. While some traditional owners are allowed to hunt the animal for cultural reasons, hunters who do not hold this right are abusing the resource.

Mandubarra Land and Sea Corporation spokesman James Epong said the situation had become so bad in some parts of the Far North that traditional owners feared dugongs may become extinct. "Between Mossman and Innisfail, (dugong) are going to be extinct in these areas, because of indigenous people and Islander people moving into a town and just freely going out and taking what they want," Mr Epong said. "The traditional owners of the land, we're up in arms. "We even put our boats in between the dugong and the hunters if we don't know who they are." It has been estimated about 200 dugongs are killed in Far Northern waters each year.

In Federal Parliament on Monday, the Opposition called for bipartisan support for a national dugong and sea turtle protection plan. But Environment Minister Tony Burke failed to respond to questions from The Cairns Post yesterday about whether the Government would support the move. Opposition environment spokesman Greg Hunt said there needed to be a crackdown on illegal dugong hunting. Leichhardt MP Warren Entsch also backed the call, saying dugong were hunted to local extinction in Mauritius and Taiwan. "It is going to happen in this area unless something is done at the national level, because the threats and the challenges to these magnificent species mean that we may have another Tasmanian tiger on our hands," Mr Entsch said.

*Full story and source: [http://www.cairns.com.au/article/2010/10/27/132285\\_local-news.html](http://www.cairns.com.au/article/2010/10/27/132285_local-news.html)*

*Related stories: [http://www.cairns.com.au/article/2010/10/30/132861\\_local-news.html](http://www.cairns.com.au/article/2010/10/30/132861_local-news.html)*

### **Dugong could be extinct within 40 years (Sydney, Australia)**

*26 October 2010, Sydney Morning Herald, AAP*

Dugong could be extinct within 40 years if governments don't intervene to stamp out unsustainable traditional hunting practices, senior coalition MP Warren Entsch has warned.

Using figures released at an international conference in Abu Dhabi earlier this month, Mr Entsch said the animals, also called sea cows, were already extinct in many areas. Mr Entsch, whose north Queensland electorate of Leichhardt covers prime dugong territory, said the evidence suggested the species could be completely extinct worldwide within 40 years.

An estimated 2000 dugong are taken from Queensland waters each year under traditional hunting provisions, he said, although the number could be significantly higher. "We seriously need to look at this, and I think it would be irresponsible for us as a society to allow this to continue," Mr Entsch said.

In federal parliament on Monday night, coalition MPs called for the establishment of a National Dugong & Turtle Protection Plan to save the species from extinction. Mr Entsch said the plan would need to include a temporary moratorium on hunting so authorities could determine how many dugong were left in the wild. Under the plan, he said traditional owners would be encouraged to notify authorities of illegal or inappropriate hunting. "People will argue that it is about taking away native title rights, but I can assure you if the species dies out that is a guaranteed way of enjoying no native title rights."

*Full story and source: <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-national/dugong-could-be-extinct-within-40-years-20101026-1728m.html>*

### **2nd eelgrass dieback in 6 years raises concern for plant's future (USA)**

*04 November 2010, by Karl Blankenship, The Chesapeake Bay Journal*

This summer's scorching temperatures appear to have baked eelgrass beds in the lower Bay, causing the second dieback in six years for this important underwater grass species.

Bob Orth, a seagrass expert with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, said several places he and his VIMS colleagues visited this fall had either completely lost their eelgrass or had very reduced densities compared with what [www.seagrasswatch.org](http://www.seagrasswatch.org)

would have been seen in a normal fall. He has received several reports of an eelgrass dieback from others. But, he cautioned, it appears the dieback may not be as severe as what happened in 2005. A few plants still remained in many places this fall, whereas they were totally absent in many beds in 2005.

The extent and ultimate influence of the dieback won't be known until annual aerial surveys of the Bay's underwater grass beds take place next summer and in-depth sampling is conducted on permanently established eelgrass sites in different parts of the lower Bay, Orth said. But the implications could be significant because eelgrass is the dominant underwater grass in high-salinity areas of the Chesapeake Bay and provides crucial habitat for a host of other species, such as blue crabs. If the beds do not bounce back next year, the loss would threaten the health of those species, too, because large areas would either have very sparse grass or be left barren.

*Full story and source: <http://www.bayjournal.com/article.cfm?article=3959>*

### **Take extra precautions to avoid manatees (Florida, USA)**

*4 November 2010, by Nanette O'Hara, Tampa Bay Online*

The Tampa Bay Manatee Awareness Coalition reminds boaters that several slow speed zones go into effect Nov. 15 to protect manatees that will be gathering near area power plants as water temperatures fall. As many as 350 manatees are expected to spend all or part of the winter months in Tampa Bay and its tributaries. When water temperatures consistently drop below 68 degrees, the majority of the animals will be in or near Tampa Electric Company's Big Bend power plant near Apollo Beach.

Through Sept. 30, eight manatees have been killed by watercraft in Hillsborough, Manatee and Pinellas counties. Already this year, a record 656 animals have died statewide, most as a result of the severe cold weather early in 2010. Manatees are most in danger of being hit by boats when in waters less than 6 feet deep that contain underwater seagrass meadows where the animals feed and rest. These flats, and their deeper edges, are popular with anglers as well as manatees.

The Manatee Awareness Coalition also reminds boaters to stay in marked channels when traveling on plane, to wear polarized glasses and to watch for tail swirls that indicate the presence of manatees.

*Full story and source: <http://www2.tbo.com/content/2010/nov/04/take-extra-precautions-avoid-manatees/>*

### **Unravelling mysteries of Lake Macquarie (NSW, Australia)**

*4 November 2010, by Damon Cronshaw, Newcastle Herald*

A scientific project is under way to unravel the mysteries of Lake Macquarie and help protect it. The project aims to help Lake Macquarie City Council and the state government better understand the lake to maintain and improve it.

Council ecosystems co-ordinator Symon Walpole said it would enable the lake's floor and water depth to be assessed. Water quality, ecology and water movement around the lake will be examined. The project will help authorities to understand how seagrass, small creatures and algae that live on the lake bed contribute to the lake's health. Habitat and the water quality that fish need to function will be considered.

The council is doing the project with the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water. It includes a \$30,000 survey of 1000 kilometres of the lake with the Sea Scan catamaran. A department spokeswoman said the results would be used to identify changes to the lake in the past three decades. The lake was last measured in 1977 and surveys done then were not extensive. The council will use new data to create computer models that will enable it to examine how development scenarios would affect the lake.

*Full story and source: <http://www.theherald.com.au/news/local/news/general/unravelling-mysteries-of-lake-macquarie/1987549.aspx>*

### **Loss of Indian River Lagoon seagrass beds threatening fish breeding grounds (Florida, USA)**

*28 October 2010, by Tyler Treadway, TCPalm*

The lower Indian River Lagoon is a crossroads at a crossroads, according to R. Grant Gilmore Jr., senior scientist and president of Estuarine, Coastal and Ocean Science Inc. in Vero Beach. Speaking on Thursday to the Rivers Coalition, Gilmore called the area of the lagoon near the St. Lucie Inlet and the St. Lucie Estuary a "crossroads" of biodiversity because it serves as the nursery for fish species found throughout the Eastern Seaboard. But the lagoon is at a crossroads, he added, because loss of its seagrass beds threatens the nursery and the fish raised in it.

Within 10 miles of the St. Lucie Inlet, Gilmore said, 800 species of fish can be found — 400 of them in the lagoon. But Gilmore said at least 80 percent of the seagrass beds within 3 miles of the St. Lucie Inlet were lost between 2004 and 2006, a result of hurricane damage, releases of nutrient-rich freshwater from Lake Okeechobee and local — often polluted — water runoff. Since 2006, he added "a lot of the seagrass has come back, maybe 60 to 70 percent of it."

The coalition, a consortium of civic groups, homeowner association and fishing clubs, is suing the Army Corps of Engineers in an effort to stop the Lake O releases; and Gilmore said the discharges continue to be a "main component" of the seagrass loss by dropping salinity levels the grass needs to grow. The short-term outlook for seagrass is good, Gilmore said, thanks to predictions of a drier-than-normal dry season this winter and spring.

*Full story and source: <http://www.tcpalm.com/news/2010/oct/28/loss-of-indian-river-lagoon-seagrass-beds-fish/>*

### **Sea food chain devastation affects SI (Solomon Islands)**

*27 October 2010, by Ednal Palmer, Solomon Star*

Solomon Islands is indirectly suffering from the devastation of ocean food web. A Marine researcher John Fairfax of Australia said the problem is serious and need collective action from governments. "Sewage nutrient pollution is the main cause. There's devastation on the sea chain that eventually feed many local Solomon Islands families who depend on fish in an every day meal," Mr Fairfax said.

He said marine ecosystem devastation is continuing and is having serious consequences. "Seagrass which many species depend on is devastated due to sewage nutrient pollution feeding algae and epiphyte growth that is smothering seagrass leaf, reducing and stopping sunlight and essential seagrass plant photosynthesis." He said mortality of marine feeding animals constitutes vitally important evidence of SW Pacific Ocean ecosystem food web supply devastation.

*Full story and source: <http://www.solomonstarnews.com/news/national/8737-sea-food-chain-devastation-affects-si>*

### **Spring bypassing work underway at Port Geographe (Perth, Western Australia)**

*27 October 2010*

Work is underway to remove sand and seagrass wrack from the beach at Port Geographe as part of ongoing efforts to manage the coastline in the area. Department of Transport general manager of coastal infrastructure Steve Jenkins said the annual bypassing involves moving seagrass wrack and sand from the beach, adjacent to the western groyne, east to approved discharge areas at Wonnerup. Mr Jenkins said the work followed the successful completion of similar bypassing at Port Geographe in April and May this year.

Preparations for the bypassing work were completed last week and trucking and pumping are underway. The work is scheduled to be completed prior the Busselton Ironman event in early December.

Mr Jenkins said DoT, in consultation with the Shire of Busselton, had called for tenders for the bypassing works because the developer at Port Geographe had ceased work on the project and was not meeting coastal maintenance work obligations. He said the bypassing works, along with previous dredging and bypassing projects, were being funded from a bank guarantee provided by the developer and other commercial entities, required by the Port Geographe Development Deed.

*Full story and source: <http://www.busseltonmail.com.au/news/local/news/general/spring-bypassing-work-underway-at-port-geographe/1980872.aspx>*

### **Fremantle Harbour Dredging Affects Seagrass ? (Australia)**

*25 October 2010, by Jane Hammond, Dredging Today*

Scientists are checking the health of seagrass beds and coral reefs off Fremantle following environmental tests that showed the plume from Fremantle Ports long- running dredging project was cutting light to areas of high ecological value.

Fremantle Ports latest monitoring report showed light levels had triggered management action over parts of the Hall Bank coral site and in areas of seagrass beds north of the harbour entrance. An assessment of the effects on coral and seagrass is expected soon.

*Full story and source: <http://www.dredgingtoday.com/2010/10/25/fremantle-harbour-dredging-affects-seagrass-australia/>*

### **Two projects nourish lagoon (Florida, USA)**

*23 October 2010, by Jim Waymer, Florida Today*

PALM BAY — While Indian River Lagoon advocates want us to control stormwater in our own yards, government has two big, long-awaited "replumbings" that could pay huge dividends for the estuary's health. Officials say the \$50 million in new water-control structures and storage areas soon will ease fresh-water shocks during downpours, allowing more seagrass to grow, with fish and clams to follow.

The two projects -- one in Fellsmere, the other in Palm Bay -- could make the lagoon's next 20 years healthier than its last, officials say, by steering water closer to the way it flowed a century ago. As the region celebrates the 20th anniversary of the federal government making the lagoon part of the National Estuary Program, St. Johns officials are pointing to the two projects as major milestones in the estuary's recovery. Too much fresh water, too fast lowers the

lagoon's salt content and clouds the water so sunlight can't reach seagrass -- the main nursery ground for fish, crabs and other marine life.

*Full story and source: <http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20101023/NEWS01/10230319/1006/Two+projects+nourish+lagoon>*

## **Seagrass: Indian River Lagoon report card (Florida, USA)**

*23 October 2010, by Jim Waymer, Florida Today*

Seagrass, the main barometer of lagoon health, has generally improved in the past 20 years, officials say. Overall, seagrass has surpassed the program's 1943 baseline for growth, the earliest year for which aerial photos exist.

But grass coverage is mixed depending on how close beds lie to older cities with poor stormwater infrastructure, especially near Melbourne, Cocoa, Rockledge and Vero Beach. Boaters also leave fewer scars on grass, officials say.

Estimates based on aerial photographs taken in 1943 found 62,000 acres of seagrass. Surveys in 2006 and 2007 found more than 72,400 acres of seagrass, although density of in some seagrass beds declined.

*Full story and source: <http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20101023/NEWS01/101022040/1006/Seagrass-Indian-River-Lagoon-report-card>*

## **SEAGRASS-WATCH Magazine**

Previous issues of the magazine, Seagrass-Watch News: The official magazine of the Seagrass-Watch global assessment and monitoring program are available online at: <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/magazine.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.

*Please visit the conference & workshop web site for further details: <http://www.sc.psu.ac.th/seagrass/>*

## **SEAGRASS-WATCH on YouTube**

**Seagrass: Pastures of the sea** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66Y5vqswj20> OR <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/seagrass.html>

Presentation on what seagrasses are and why they are important (10,881 views to date)

## **GALLERY**

**Whitsunday - Mackay (Qld, Australia): 06 - 09 October 2010** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Hamilton Island, 06 Oct 2010

Pioneer Bay, 07 Oct 2010

Sarina Inlet, 08 Oct 2010

Hydeaway Bay, 09 Oct 2010

**Singapore: 08 - 09 October 2010** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

**Tuas, 08 Oct 2010**

*I joined Sheryl and Helen and the volunteers from Schering Plough who monitor the seagrass meadows at Tuas just outside their premises. Alas, the shore there has changed dramatically. What used to be a sandy shore, is now very rocky! As a result, there is very little seagrass in the area. A few patches of *Halophila ovalis* struggle on among the rocks. There are still some seagrasses on the sandier areas that remain. But these lie outside the study area. Text by Ria Tan.*

**Chek Jawa, 09 Oct 2010**

*A small team headed out to Chek Jawa for our regular seagrass monitoring. I helped out at Site 2, and did transect 1 which is fast being taken over by the encroaching sand bar! There is only a tiny patch of *Thalassia hemprichii* on Chek Jawa and it lies between our transect 1 and 2 at site 2. Alas, I noticed many of the blades were yellow! The seaward edge of large stretches of Chek Jawa are cloaked in a fresh green meadow of *Halophila spinulosa*. Text by Ria Tan.*

**Mission Beach (Qld, Australia): 04 - 05 October 2010** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Dunk Island, 04 Oct 2010

Lugger Bay, 05 Oct 2010

## FROM HQ

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

**Seagrass-Watch Magazine** <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.