



# Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

## 03 October 2011

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## **Don't panic over turtle deaths: ecologist (Qld, Australia)**

03 October 2011, by Kym Angius *The Brisbane Times*

There is no need to panic over the spike in turtle deaths along Queensland's coast, an ecologist says. In the past nine months, 1000 turtles, mostly green turtles, have died, compared with 555 in 2010, 625 in 2009 and 552 in 2008, figures from the Department of Environment and Resource Management show. They are mostly dying from natural causes and are often found emaciated, with just mangrove seeds or algae in their stomachs.

Seagrasses, turtles' main food source, have died off in record amounts after millions of tonnes of sediment flowed into coastal areas during the summer's floods. James Cook University marine turtle ecologist Dr Mark Hamann says the turtle population is resilient and the scale of deaths have been taken out of context. The last survey of green turtles in coral areas, not including coastal areas, counted 800,000, increasing by three per cent a year, Dr Hamann said.

Concerns have been raised that a mass dredging project in the Port of Gladstone is contributing to the turtle die-off. Around 46 million cubic tonnes of seabed is being dredged to make way for two liquefied natural gas plants and export hubs at Curtis Island, as well as the expansion of the Gladstone port. Local fishermen and the Australian Greens want dredging to be suspended until it can be confirmed that it's not linked to marine life dying off. Of the 1000 turtles that have become stranded this year, 188 were found in the Gladstone area, where six dolphins and eight dugongs have also died. The Gladstone port corporation argues there is no scientific evidence to suggest the project to date has had any effect that would contribute to the loss of marine life or disease in fish.

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

## **New marine park set to triple total area in WA coastal waters (WA, Australia)**

30 September 2011, by Hope Holborow, *Science Network Western Australia*

Planning for the proposed Eighty Mile Beach marine park is underway with the release of the Indicative Management plan for public comment by Environment Minister Bill Marmion today in Broome. A key part of the \$63 million Kimberly Science and Conservation Strategy, the plan would guide management of the marine park over the next ten years.

The proposed Eighty Mile Beach Marine Park is one of four proposed new marine parks to be considered as a part of the new Kimberley Wilderness Parks, a key component of the state governments major conservation strategy for the Kimberley. The four new marine parks will nearly triple the total area of marine parks and reserves in WA coastal waters and together will also protect the largest Humpback whale calving area in the southern hemisphere. "The proposed Eighty Mile Beach marine park will provide protection for a unique and spectacular part of the lower west Kimberley coastline, while providing for sustainable tourism use and enjoyment of the area and the maintenance of Aboriginal culture and heritage," he says. Along WA's north west coast, Eighty Mile Beach lies between Broome and Port Headland.

The new marine park would cover an area of about 209,00 hectares of coast, stretching from the south-west to the north-east of the state and encompassing all of Eighty Mile Beach, protecting migratory shorebirds and unique marine life while promoting collaborative management with traditional owners. "The Ramsar-listed Eighty Mile Beach is one of the worlds most significant feeding grounds for migratory shorebirds and supports an important nesting population of flatback turtles (*Natator depressus*) that are endemic to northern Australia," the Minister says. The area is also rich in other marine life including sawfish (*Pristis pristis*), dugong (*Dugong dugon*), dolphins (*Tursiops* sp) and millions of invertebrates that inhabit the sand, mud flats, seagrass meadows, coral reefs and mangroves. The period for public comment closes at 5pm on January 20, 2012 and the Minister encourages everyone to have their say.

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Related article: <http://news.ninemsn.com.au/national/8354137/northwest-marine-park-to-cover-209000ha>

## **Floods may impact Moreton Bay marine life (Qld, Australia)**

28 September 2011, *UQ News*

Dr Chris Roelfsema, from the School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Management at UQ, is concerned about the impact the 2011 floods may have on seagrass in Moreton Bay. Dr Roelfsema and his colleagues Professor Stuart Phinn, PhD student Mitch Lyons and others have been using remotely sensed imagery and data collected in the field, from 1999 onwards to map seagrass cover in Moreton Bay and will use this data to assess the impacts of the floods earlier this year. "The current seagrass percentage cover will be compared to previous years' data and maps. This will indicate the extent of the impact from the 2011 floods," Dr Roelfsema said.

As part of the research the Eastern Banks of Moreton Bay will be examined in more detail to determine the abundance and distribution of seagrass species and the *Lyngbya majuscula* bacteria, which can affect seagrass growth. During February, April, June and September 2012 maps of *Lyngbya* distributions will be analysed in relation to movements of turtles and dugongs who are tracked by researchers from Queensland Park and Wildlife Services.

Dr Roelfsema works with the Biophysical Remote Sensing Group (BRG) at The University of Queensland. The current work will be extended under a proposed ARC Linkage project with the University of Western Australia to use remote sensing and integrated field techniques for mapping and monitoring coral reef and seagrass habitats. Results will be used for ongoing monitoring and management of the Moreton Bay by marine authorities.

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### **Indigenous group suspends hunting in the wake of summer disasters (Australia)**

28 September 2011, Media Newswire (press release)

Environment Minister Vicky Darling has today applauded a move by North Queensland indigenous clans to suspend the traditional hunting of both turtles and dugong as the species continues to suffer from the fallout of the state's summer disasters.

Ms Darling said the Girrigun Aboriginal Corporation was leading the push to suspend traditional hunting until both species properly recover from summer's floods and cyclones which had a devastating effect on seagrass beds – their major food source – the length of the Queensland coastline. She said the suspension involves two Aboriginal clans which – even though they are covered by an earlier agreement to cap hunting of turtles and dugong and hold Native Titles rights over sea country north of Townsville - have agreed to suspend hunting indefinitely. "I think this move speaks volumes about the capacity of local traditional owners groups to make their own informed decisions about cultural practices that have existed for thousands of years," Ms Darling said. "I congratulate the clans of Girrigun for this decision because it acknowledges that while there are severe limitations in addressing the food supply crisis hitting turtles and dugong, we can address the impacts humans are having on the population and hunting is one of them."

The Girringun decision follows a landmark voluntary agreement reached just two weeks ago by Traditional Owners to suspend hunting of dugong in an area from Gladstone to Bundaberg. Ms Darling said the agreement between four Traditional Owner groups and the State and Commonwealth Governments meant no dugong would be taken through hunting in an area extending from Burrum Heads, south of Bundaberg, to – and including – Curtis Island off Gladstone. "As a part of this agreement, the traditional owners of this country have decided that they will not hunt dugong and will limit their take of green turtles to a maximum of 20 per year for the next five years.

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### **Turtles and dugongs die in droves: DERM (Australia)**

26 September 2011, Ninemsn

Deaths of turtles and dugongs off Queensland have nearly doubled this year as seagrass struggles to recover from floods, an international conference on rivers has heard. The Department of Environment and Resource's Dr Julia Playford told the International River Symposium in Brisbane that the animals were scavenging mangrove seeds and algae because seagrass beds, their major food source, had been destroyed by sediment, turbidity and low salinity after last summer's floods and Cyclone Yasi.

She said one million tonnes of sediment had washed into Brisbane's Moreton Bay from the floods, three times the annual average in just 10 days. South of Brisbane, 344,000 tonnes of sediment flowed down the Logan and Albert rivers, 10 times the annual load. In the state's north, Cyclone Yasi had stirred up sediment at depths of up to 190 metres. "That has been followed up with a significant increase of strandings of marine wildlife," Dr Playford told the symposium.

In the year to September 20, 150 dugongs had become stranded, with only three released, she said. That's compared to 68 in the same period in 2010, 37 in 2009 and 30 in 2008. Meanwhile, 999 turtles had died, compared with 555 in 2010, 625 in 2009 and 552 in 2008.

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### **Seagrass check on health of rivers (WA, Australia)**

26 September 2011, by Michelle Ridley, The West Australian

Ecologists are hoping a tiny paddle-shaped seagrass known as *Halophila ovalis* will be able to help monitor the health of the Swan and Canning rivers. A 12-month study of the seagrass, also known as paddle weed, kicked off yesterday to coincide with World Rivers Day. The seagrass will be surveyed once a month at six sites, one in the Canning River and five in the Swan River at Crawley, Mosman Park, North Fremantle, Applecross and Bicton.

Environment Minister Bill Marmion said the study would collect baseline data about the paddle weed that would be used to determine the health of the rivers. Swan River Trust senior environmental officer Jeff Cosgrove said seagrass was sensitive to changes in light and temperature and could be indirectly affected by nutrients in the river. "Globally, seagrasses are known as good indicators of environmental health," he said. "We've been focusing on physical and chemical parameters to measure the estuarine health and we're moving now into using biological parameters."

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## **Island tackles turtle troubles (Australia)**

23 September 2011, by Nathalie Fernbach, ABC Online

Five environmental groups, traditional land owners and city council will join forces to raise awareness of the hazards facing sea turtles and to examine ways to protect the creatures. Geoffrey Bay Coastcare, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the Department of Environment and Resource Management, the Sea Turtle Foundation, Queens Beach Action Group, Wulgarukaba traditional owners and Townsville City Council will examine the biology, habitat, nesting habits, threats to and management of turtles around Magnetic Island during a turtle nesting workshop this weekend. Geoffrey Bay Coastcare's Vandhana hopes the workshop will act as a catalyst to get more locals and visitors involved in turtle care.

In addition to degradation of the turtles' nesting sites due to natural erosion and cars driving on the beach, sea turtles have been struggling to find food since cyclone Yasi explains Vandhana. The turtle nesting workshop will be held on Sunday 25th of September from 1:00pm at the Magnetic Island Bowls Club as part of the Bay Days Festival.

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

## **Boat blamed for sea turtle death (Qld, Australia)**

23 September 2011, Fraser Coast Chronicle

Two mortally injured sea turtles have washed up and died on a Bay beach. One of the turtles expired soon after rangers arrived on the scene at Point Vernon yesterday. Its shell was shattered by a boat strike and it barely had the strength to blink. The latest deaths come after a dugong washed ashore near the WetSide Aquatic Park on Sunday and died from a ruptured bowel.

The deaths of these marine animals come in the same week as a handful of boaties have been fined for speeding in marine park go-slow zones. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service operations manager Peter Wright said five boaties were caught ignoring go-slow zones in the Great Sandy Marine Park at the weekend. Four were issued with fines and one with a warning notice as rangers cracked down to protect vulnerable sea life. Penalties for not observing these regulations start at \$400 and have a maximum court-imposed penalty of \$1000.

Mr Wright said the summer floods had a devastating effect on coastal seagrass beds causing turtles and dugongs to forage longer over extended areas to find food. This made them more vulnerable to boat strikes.

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## **Starvation not cause of death (Qld, Australia)**

20 September 2011, by Matt Nott, Fraser Coast Chronicle

An autopsy conducted on a dugong that washed up on the beach in Hervey Bay has brought with it hope that the seagrass meadows of the Great Sandy Strait have survived the inundation of silt carried off the mainland by flood waters late last year.

Department of Resource and Environment regional spokesman Ross Belcher said initial reports from the autopsy conducted on Sunday showed that the dugong had died with its stomach full. For Mr Belcher, who is the regional manager for the Great Sandy Strait region, this autopsy results are good news.

"It hard to measure the conditions of the seagrass meadows, but they seem to be in better condition that we anticipated," he said. "At the beginning of the year after the floods it was looking catastrophic."

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## **Floods having lethal effect on marine life (Qld, Australia)**

14 September 2011, by Matt Wordsworth, ABC Online

Animal welfare groups up and down the Queensland coast are reporting record numbers of turtle and dugong deaths in the wake of the state's massive floods earlier this year. Marine scientists say seagrass beds have been smothered, and the next 12 to 18 months will be crucial for some species. Fred Nucifora from Townsville's Turtle Hospital says the Great Barrier Reef has already seen a staggering number of turtle deaths this year - 910 compared to 515 at this point last year.

Marine scientists are just as concerned for the endangered dugong. At the end of August there were 132 deaths recorded, compared to 62 in the same period last year.

Dr Christine Williams, from the Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management, is not surprised by the numbers. "The issue of turtle deaths and dugong deaths following flooding is not a unique phenomenon unfortunately," she said. "It has happened in the past, but in the most recent past this is the biggest event we've ever had recorded in Queensland." She says silty water laced with herbicides and pesticides that has flushed from rivers during a flood smothers and kills seagrass, the main food source for turtles and dugongs.

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

## **Seagrass beds 'store \$79 per ha of carbon' (Australia)**

13 September 2011, Belinda Cranston, Ninemsn

They've been quietly storing carbon dioxide for decades without causing a fuss or charging anyone a cent for the privilege but Australia's seagrass beds are at risk of being destroyed by climate change, a think tank says.

Seagrasses store 10 to 40 times as much carbon per hectare as forests, and Australia's seagrass meadows are the largest in the world, a report by the Centre for Policy Development says. Considering the Gillard government wants to charge \$23 per tonne of carbon emitted by Australia's biggest polluters, that would make Australia's coastal seagrass beds worth \$79 per hectare, the report's authors added at its official launch on Tuesday.

To some extent, the carbon has been absorbed without there being any damage to ecosystems, says Caroline Hoisington, co-author of *Stocking Up: Securing our Marine Economy*. Ocean ecosystems add an extra \$25 billion to the national economy each year which is not accounted for in official figures, the report says. These includes \$15.8 billion a year in carbon storage.

It was also of concern that 29 per cent of the world's sea grass beds had vanished since 1879. In Western Australia, about 1,000 hectares of sea grass were lost after a particularly warm summer, Ms Hoisington added. Land based pollution had also contributed to the loss of the sea grass beds.

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

## **Mass starvation of dugongs and turtles on Great Barrier Reef (Qld, Australia)**

11 September 2011, by Jonathan Pearlman, *The Telegraph*

A sudden mass starvation of turtles and dugongs, a rare sea mammal, off the coast of Queensland has prompted warnings of a long-term natural disaster in the normally sheltered waters just inshore of Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Now naturalists fear that up to 1,500 dugongs – a species of sea cows – and 6,000 turtles along the Reef are likely to die in the coming months because their main food source, seagrass, which grows on the ocean floor, was largely wiped out by the floods and cyclone.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority says it expects more dugongs to die than in any previous event. Mark Read, a protected species expert at the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, said turtles and dugongs were the "lawnmowers of the sea" and their losses could have a damaging impact on the overall marine ecology.

One of the world's experts on dugongs, Prof Helene Marsh, from James Cook University, said she was concerned about the dugong's future in the southern section of the Reef. "It is unprecedented that such a huge area of coast was affected. In this case, because the floods and cyclone were so huge and the damage so widespread - and it followed a wet year last year - we are wondering whether these animals have anywhere else to go."

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

## **Findings will be made public (Qld, Australia)**

10 September 2011, by David Sparkes, *The Gladstone Observer*

Environment Minister Vicky Darling flew into Gladstone yesterday to address the community's growing anxiety over marine animal deaths. The minister was invited to the region by Gladstone Region Mayor Gail Sellers.

Cr Sellers has been calling for the Scientific Advisory Committee to release specific data on the deaths of turtles, dugongs and dolphins this year. Ms Darling did not release that information yesterday, but told reporters the data would be appearing on the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) website on Monday. She said the committee had examined commercial net fishing, seagrass beds and water quality in the area. Ms Darling said the evidence pointed clearly to seagrass depletion.

Cr Sellers said she was happy with the minister's response to her concerns, and the information provided on Monday would go a long way to clearing confusion in the community. Ms Darling used her media conference at Spinnaker Park to announce a new initiative to rehabilitate seagrass beds in the Port Curtis. She said DERM would be calling for tenders from researchers and scientists to undertake a program to rehabilitate and improve the resilience of seagrass beds.

World Wildlife Fund Queensland manager Nick Heath said the Minister's announcement for a program of seagrass rehabilitation was worth trying as an experiment, but only time would tell if it would be successful. "It's expensive. It's difficult to manage all the variables. We believe prevention is better than cure," Mr Heath said.

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

## **Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke rules out ban on sea turtle and dugong hunting (Qld, Australia)**

09 September 2011, by Heather Beck *The Cairns Post*

Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke has ruled out an outright ban on sea turtle and dugong hunting, saying he did not support the "knee-jerk" reaction of taking away the rights of traditional owners. At Cooya Beach yesterday, Mr

Burke announced a Federal funding boost of \$5 million to help indigenous groups make inroads into dugong conservation by giving them the resources to monitor animal numbers, patrol local waters and stop illegal poaching.

Mr Burke was met with an initially prickly reception from Eastern Kuku Yalanji people who were in the dark about the announcement. However, he emphasised the project was about indigenous leadership, with regional forums the first step to find out what communities believe should be done. Information and ideas from the forums will be partnered with scientific information before traditional owners can apply directly for a share of the \$5 million.

Kuku Yalanji traditional owners Bennett Walker and Ray Pierce hope the funding will give communities the means and power to enforce compliance, rather than resulting in more talk.

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

### **\$23m to protect Cape York Peninsula (Australia)**

*08 September 2011, SBS World News Australia*

The Queensland and federal governments have announced \$23 million to protect Cape York Peninsula ahead of a potential bid for World Heritage status. Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke said the new funds would finance the purchase of high conservation value land for inclusion in Australia's national reserve system. It would also support consultation with Indigenous communities, and their participation in sustainable agriculture and natural resource management. The funds will support the voluntary acquisition of land considered to be of national environmental significance.

Queensland Environment Minister Vicky Darling said indigenous people must be given opportunities to manage their own country, for conservation and appropriate economic development purposes. The announcement includes \$3 million to support engagement and consultation with the Indigenous people of Cape York towards a potential future World Heritage nomination, and for the mapping of environmental and cultural values.

The Wilderness Society welcomed the funding but warned the money could be wasted unless the Cape was protected from coal mining and other threats. The society again called on governments to impose a moratorium on new developments until the conclusion of the World Heritage process.

The conservation group WWF said it also welcomed the funding to help indigenous communities conserve turtles and dugongs and better manage their own sea country. It said the announcement came amid unprecedented turtle and dugong deaths after the recent natural disasters, and amid ongoing threats from irresponsible fishing practices and major coastal development. The group said it hoped whoever won the next state election would invest in an indigenous ranger program to tackle turtle and dugong poaching.

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

### **Ports CEO defends dredging (Qld, Australia)**

*02 September 2011, by David Sparkes, Gladstone Observer*

Gladstone Ports Corporation CEO Leo Zussino has launched a passionate defence of the Western Basin Dredging Project. Speaking at a media conference yesterday, Mr Zussino said he understood community anxiety over the extraordinary number of marine animal deaths this year, but all the scientific evidence so far pointed to depleted seagrass meadows being the cause, rather than dredging.

Mr Zussino said he was concerned the public had not been made fully aware that there have been marine animal deaths along most of the Queensland coast this year. He also emphasised that scientific evidence showed those deaths were almost certainly due to seagrass being damaged by the floods.

Some community members and commercial fishermen have been seething in their belief that the dredging project had caused turbidity and damage to seagrass levels, leading to marine mammal deaths and damage to fish stocks.

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

### **Dugong protection plan (Qld, Australia)**

*02 September 2011, Gladstone Observer*

The LNP's announcement to better protect Queensland's dugongs and turtles from poachers is welcome but lacks substance without a funding commitment that would enable indigenous communities to better manage their own sea country, the World Wildlife Fund says. WWF is calling for \$30 million over 5 years to invest in an indigenous ranger program for communities along the Queensland coast to stop illegal turtle and dugong hunting.

WWF says \$30 million would adequately resource indigenous communities to stop illegal dugong and turtle hunting, undertake important research and monitoring work, and implement voluntary measures to ensure traditional dugong and turtle take is within sustainable limits.

CEO of the Giringun Aboriginal Corporation Phil Rist also called for greater investment to help traditional owners undertake research, monitoring and evaluation work that would underpin existing indigenous conservation measures.

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

## **Indian River Lagoon seagrass in drastic decline (Florida, USA)**

25 September 2011, Florida Today

Lauren Hall, a scientist with the St. Johns River Water Management District, sees up close the impacts too many nutrients have on lagoon grass beds. She dives monthly to measure the growth trends, and lately, finds drastic declines. Seagrass naturally recedes in the winter. But during this summer growing season, grass beds only grew half as much as normal. Biologists mostly blame a nagging green algae bloom that's blocked sunlight to seagrass since April.

Seagrass had been growing in more areas over the past decade but in thinner densities. And according to Hall's early data from this year, nearly all the seagrass has died in some spots along Cocoa and Melbourne. A remote patch of seagrass immediately south of Wabasso Causeway is usually among the most stable. Not this year, or this day. Hall moves back a PVC marker 28 meters closer to shore to indicate how much the grass beds' edge has receded since last month.

Full story and source: <http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20110925/NEWS01/109250311/Indian-River-Lagoon-seagrass-dramatic-decline>

## **Researchers help monitor sea grass in Barnegat Bay (USA)**

25 September 2011, Press of Atlantic City

Visibility in the water was barely two inches thanks to a stiff northwesterly breeze and an incoming tide along a shallow stretch in Little Egg Harbor Bay, but Sean Towers was half-submerged with a mask and snorkel, trying to count the swaying blades of grass.

Towers, wearing a black wetsuit, in water roughly thigh-deep, would pop his head out every few moments to give his professor, Jessie Jarvis, the count: 90 *Zostera*; 40 *Ruppia*; 50 *algae*. Jarvis noted the numbers and then told her student the next place he needed to conduct a count. Towers disappeared again beneath the turbid and choppy waters.

The code sounds alien, but all it meant was the percentage of how much of two species of aquatic grasses and a total amount of seaweed that was growing in a southerly section of Barnegat Bay that Towers and Jarvis were monitoring as part of a summer research project. The project, paid for through a grant with the Barnegat Bay Student Grant Program with Save Barnegat Bay, is testing a new type of sonar system for the Army Corps of Engineers that could better detect underwater grass beds.

In Barnegat Bay, the amount of seagrasses has drastically declined as sediment and algal blooms clouded the water and created seasonally driven dead zones that cause chemical changes in the sediment. Since 2004 the amount of grasses at more than 100 sampling sites throughout the bay has declined by between 50 percent and 88 percent, said Rutgers professor Michael Kennish. The major causes stem from an excessive amount of nitrogen entering the bay's water, mostly from stormwater runoff, and an increasing summer water temperature that gets too hot for eel grass, a cool-water species, to survive.

Full story and source: [http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/news/breaking/researchers-help-monitor-sea-grass-in-barnegat-bay/article\\_7d9230c2-e6ed-11e0-b346-001cc4c002e0.html](http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/news/breaking/researchers-help-monitor-sea-grass-in-barnegat-bay/article_7d9230c2-e6ed-11e0-b346-001cc4c002e0.html)

Related article: ,

## **Extinction of sea turtle detrimental to human survival (Caribbean)**

23 September 2011, The Leeward Times

President Nevis Turtle Group and Country Co-ordinator for Wider Caribbean Sea turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST), Mr. Lemuel Pemberton has warned that the extinction of sea turtle species will lead to a radical extinction of reef fish which we depend of for survival.

According to a report on Sea Turtle Conservancy's website, much can be learned about the condition of the planet's environment by looking at sea turtles which have existed for over 100 million years, and have travelled throughout the world's oceans. The report submitted that it is possible that a world in which sea turtles can not survive may soon become a world in which humans struggle to survive. However, we have been reassured that if we learn

Sea turtles, chiefly green sea turtles, are one of the very few animals that eat seagrass. Like usual lawn grass, seagrass needs to be continuously cut short to keep it healthy and help it grow across the sea floor rather than just getting longer grass blades. Over the past decades, there has been a decline in seagrass beds. This decline may be linked to the lower numbers of sea turtles.

Full story and source: [http://www.leewardstimes.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1088:extinction-of-sea-turtle-detrimental-to-human-survival&catid=1:latest-news&Itemid=50](http://www.leewardstimes.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1088:extinction-of-sea-turtle-detrimental-to-human-survival&catid=1:latest-news&Itemid=50)

## **Marine Meadows Workshop Brings Eelgrass Restoration to Sag Harbor (USA)**

22 September 2011, The Sag Harbor Express

This Thursday and Friday, trained experts from the Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) will forage shoots of healthy eelgrass from marine meadows throughout the region. They will then bring them to Sag Harbor and enlist the help of dozens of volunteers to aid in the Cooperative's 18-year-old Eelgrass Restoration Program.

On Saturday — National Estuaries Day — the Cornell Cooperative Extension along with The Peconic Land Trust and the Sag Harbor Oyster Club hope to give East End residents a hands-on experience and education in eelgrass restoration. From 3 to 5 p.m., the organizations will gather under tents at Bay Burger just outside Sag Harbor Village for the Marine Meadows Workshop. Volunteers will be asked to weave eelgrass shoots into burlap disks that will be planted in the Peconic Estuary the next day, establishing a new, healthy eelgrass meadow which ideally will become habitat for finfish and shellfish, and enhance the overall health of the bays.

According to the CCE's Habitat Restoration Outreach Specialist Kim Barbour, the Marine Meadows Program is a community-based, collaborative initiative developed by the Cooperative as an offshoot of its Eelgrass Restoration Program.

*Full story and source:* <http://sagharboronline.com/sagharborexpress/page-1/marine-meadows-workshop-brings-eelgrass-restoration-to-sag-harbor-14366>

## ***Yacht snagged in weed in Port Geographe canal (WA, Australia)***

*14 September 2011, Busselton Dunsborough Mail*

The Department of Transport has been asked what it will do to rectify the accumulation of seagrass in the canal entrance at Port Geographe after a yacht got stuck there last Friday. Marina operator Bob Godridge sent an email to DoT's project manager James Holder about the situation.

Mr Holder told the Mail that the Department of Transport undertook a hydrographic survey of the entrance channel in August and subsequently issued a temporary notice to mariners on August 17, urging users to navigate with caution in the area. "Following Friday's incident DoT is again inspecting the channel to determine the current extent of the navigation problem caused by the seagrass wrack accumulation," he said. "DoT will ensure that the necessary remedial works are performed if the seagrass accumulation persists. "Critically the tender process for the removal of seagrass wrack from the western beach is already underway with works anticipated to commence by October. "It is largely an overflow of seagrass from the western beach into the harbour entrance channel that is causing the current navigation problem."

*Full story and source:* <http://www.busseltonmail.com.au/news/local/news/general/yacht-snagged-in-weed-in-port-geographe-canal/2291886.aspx>

## ***Island's rich marine habitat recommended for protection***

*10 September 2011, Isle of Wight County Press*

Four areas off the Island are being recommended for special protection as designated Marine Conservation Zones, in a report published by Balanced Seas this week. Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) will help to protect nationally important wildlife, habitats and geology.

The Solent, Island and Hampshire coasts have a huge diversity of marine wildlife and habitats, ranging from muddy sheltered bays to underwater chalk ledges, rocky outcrops and the sand and gravel seabed further out to sea. The proposed MCZ between Norris and Ryde contains some of the best seagrass beds in the Solent and a substantial area of undersea mud, rich in worms.

The zone off Bembridge is described as perhaps the most diverse, with seagrass beds, rocky ledges and reefs providing habitats for a large range of species, such as seahorses, lagoon worms, stalked jellyfish and rare seaweeds. According to the report, The Needles is rich in marine wildlife due to the mix of current-swept and sheltered seabed habitats. The proposed Yarmouth to Cowes MCZ contains good examples of rocky outcrops, boulder beds and chalk formations that host rich communities of small burrowing animals. Bouldnor Cliff is highlighted for its fossilised trees and relic peat and clay formations.

The recommendations will be submitted to the government which, following public consultation, will decide which sites are designated next year.

*Full story and source:* <http://www.iwcp.co.uk/news/news/islands-rich-marine-habitat-recommended-for-protection-40619.aspx>

## ***Stormy Waters Ahead for Eelgrass (USA)***

*07 September 2011, Southern Maryland Online*

Blades of eelgrass, flowing like ribbons, were once a ubiquitous sight in all of the major western shore tributaries and the eastern side of the bay. Beds formed an abundant habitat for blue crabs, sea horses, scallops and other species. Now, eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) coverage in the bay is a fraction of what it once was, and warming waters due to climate change threatens to compound problems for the hardy, high-salinity submerged aquatic vegetation.

Over the last century, eelgrass has had an uphill battle in Chesapeake waters. Coverage dropped dramatically in the early 1930s, when a wasting disease and a hurricane devastated populations, according to a report led by Bob Orth of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science; the SAV made a spirited recovery by the 1960s. But in 1972, Tropical Storm Agnes churned the bay, wiping out many stands of bay grasses of all kinds. By the mid-1970s, eelgrass had been reduced from half of its potential area. Eelgrass made a noble comeback between 1984 and the early 1990s. But run-off continued to worsen, stressing plants and slowing recovery. Then, an unusually hot summer in 2005 — paired with high turbidity — raised water temperatures enough to greatly depress eelgrass meadows in the lower



bay. The last five to 10 years have been particularly hard on Chesapeake eelgrass, which now grows mainly in the lower bay, where salinity is high.

Virginia Institute of Marine Science researchers have examined how to bring back eelgrass since 1978 and monitored eelgrass since 1984. And recently, researchers, including Orth, and conservation groups have been helping eelgrass make a successful comeback in the Virginia coastal bays near Oyster, Va. The largest seagrass restoration project in the world takes place each year in the seagrass meadows of South Bay, off Oyster, Va., on the lower Eastern Shore. The project — started and led by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science — has broadcasted more than 37.8 million seeds on more than 300 acres in South, Cobb, Spider Crab and Hog Island bays since 1999; these seeded acres have naturally expanded to 2,430 acres of eelgrass meadows as of this year.

*Full story and source: <http://somid.com/news/headlines/2011/14296.shtml>*

### **Studland Bay seahorse film in MPA conservation bid**

*07 September 2011, BBC News*

Dorset's seahorses are starring in a film about Studland Bay in a bid to see the bay named as a Marine Protected Area (MPA), says Dorset Wildlife Trust. The film, Studland's Seahorses, shows the creatures in their breeding habitat in the seagrass meadows of Studland. Next year will see the UK's first network of MPAs established.

The trust says it has nominated the bay because it is the only site in the UK where both spiny and short snouted seahorses are breeding. The 3.9 sq km (1.5 sq mile) area is also home to endangered undulate rays. Julie Hatcher, Marine Awareness Officer at Dorset Wildlife Trust, said: "Seahorses rely on the seagrass for camouflage. They're not particularly fast swimmers and keep themselves protected by wrapping their tails around the seagrass blades, and swaying in the grass with the tide."

Short snouted seahorses, which are around six inches (15.5cm) long, live in a wider variety of habitats and can also be found in Poole Harbour. Ms Hatcher said: "Poole Harbour is a hot spot because of its eelgrass beds. A national consultation will be held in 2012 to decide which UK locations will be granted MPA status.

*Full story and source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-dorset-14820014>*

### **Fears in Miami That Port Expansion Will Destroy Reefs**

*03 September 2011, New York Times*

As Miami prepares to dredge its port to accommodate supersize freighters, environmentalists are making a last-ditch effort to protect threatened coral reefs and acres of seagrass that they say would be destroyed by the expansion.

The state's Department of Environmental Protection is on the verge of granting a final permit to the Army Corps of Engineers, which will be free to conduct 600 days of blasting to widen and deepen the channel for the port of Miami, across from the southern part of Miami Beach.

State environmental officials said there were plans to mitigate the damage to coral, seagrass and the bay, some of which is part of a state preserve. About seven acres of coral is expected to be directly affected by the blasts, and the Army Corps of Engineers will be required to transplant much of it to a trough between two reefs.

All stony coral larger than about 4 inches will be chiseled out and moved to the trough. All soft coral greater than about 10 inches will also be transplanted. At the same time, nearly eight acres of sea grass will be damaged during the expansion. To make up for that, the corps will seed 25 acres in a large underwater hole a bit farther north.

*Full story and source: [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/04/us/04coral.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/04/us/04coral.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1)*

## **GALLERY**

### **Mackay - Whitsunday, Qld (Australia): 24 - 27 October 2011** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Hamilton Is: 24 October 2011  
Sarina Inlet: 25 October 2011  
Pioneer Bay: 26 October 2011  
Midge Point: 27 October 2011

### **Broome, WA (Australia): 15 - 16 October 2011** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Demco, Roebuck Bay: 15 October 2011  
Level 1: Classroom: 15 October 2011  
Level 1: Town Beach: 16 October 2011

### **Great Sandy Strait, Qld (Australia): 12 October 2011** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Tinnanbar: 12 October 2011

## CONFERENCES

### **CERF 2011 Conference (Daytona Beach, Florida, 6-10 November 2011)**

21st Biennial Conference of the Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation.

**Societies, Estuaries and Coasts: Adapting to Change**

This theme reflects a growing realization that human societies are an integral component of ecosystems and the dynamics of these societies and ecosystems are interactive - their futures are interdependent. Nowhere is this more evident than in the estuaries and coastal zones of the planet, where human populations are concentrated, typically dominating estuarine watersheds and affecting their linkage with the local, regional, and global dynamics of the coastal ocean. CERF as a professional scientific society has increasingly focused not only on understanding causes of ecosystem change but providing information necessary to manage anthropogenic changes that have impacted the biodiversity and sustainability of estuarine and coastal systems. This conference will highlight new findings and perspectives of the interactive dynamics of diverse ecosystems and human societies, and in particular, explore how these dynamics can only be understood and managed when addressed at regional and global scales. To a greater extent than in previous CERF conferences this will include an effort to specifically address socioeconomic drivers and responses.

Please visit the conference & workshop web site for further details: <http://www.sgmeet.com/cerf2011/>

## 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.