



Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

29 February 2012

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. This E-bulletin is also available as a downloadable file (pdf) at <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/publications.html#Ebulletin>

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NEWS

Campaign to take dugong off the menu (Abu Dhabi, UEA)

29 February 2012, *The National*

Saving the dugong from extinction has as much to do with tackling poverty as it does conservation work, scientists say. A programme to help developing nations to protect and not eat the shy marine mammal, also known as the sea cow, was launched yesterday in the capital.

The programme, organised by the office of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). Their branch in Abu Dhabi services the Dugong Memorandum of Understanding, which was signed by 21 of the 40 states where dugongs live.

It aims to start community projects in Mozambique, Papua New Guinea and the Gulf of Mannar, between India from Sri Lanka. The idea is to help to improve the livelihoods of traditional communities, offering incentives to protect dugongs. Dr Donna Kwan, the programme officer for the joint effort, said the initiative was looking for funding of about US\$5 million (Dh18.3m) in the first three years. Dr Kwan said that of the three projects, the one in Mozambique's Bazaruto Archipelago is closest to completion and could be running within a year.

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

E. Kalimantan's Green Turtle Population Rapidly Dying Off (Indonesia)

28 February 2012, Jakarta Globe

The green turtle population in the Berau marine conservation area off East Kalimantan has declined by about 70 percent in the past decade as a result of human activity, a wildlife activist revealed on Monday. Rusli Andar, coordinator for World Wildlife Fund Indonesia's East Kalimantan marine program, said that there were an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 turtles in the conservation area in 2002 but that by 2010 the numbers had dropped to between 30,000 and 50,000.

"There are a lot of factors for this, including the illegal trade in turtles and turtle eggs, the killing of turtles for their shells and the continued use of trawl nets by fishermen in which the turtles get tangled up and die," he said. But the biggest threat, Rusli said, is the development of beach resorts on some of the 12 islands within the conservation zone, including Derawan and Sangalaki islands, whose beaches are important nesting grounds for turtles that lay their eggs there.

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

Dugong, Seagrass '&' Coastal Communities Initiative Launched (Abu Dhabi, UAE)

27 February 2012, WAM - Emirates News Agency

A programme to improve livelihoods and create economic opportunity in exchange for the conservation of dugongs and their seagrass habitat was officially launched in Abu Dhabi yesterday. The Dugong, Seagrass and Coastal Communities Initiative aims to attract funding partners whose investment in rural coastal communities and local partnerships will return financial and environmental benefits to communities in developing nations. The initiative will provide incentives for conservation activities and environmental safeguarding across the dugong's range using innovative financial, educational and knowledge transfer tools.

The initiative was launched at the S.O.S: Save Our Sirenians - Dugongs and West African Manatees event in Abu Dhabi, which opened with an address from Thabit Zahran Al Abdessalaam, Executive Director of the Marine and Terrestrial Biodiversity Sector, Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi (EAD) followed by an introduction to the initiative from Dr Donna Kwan, Programme Officer for the UNEP/CMS Dugong MoU.

The initiative's flagship species is the dugong, but its broader contribution will be to show how pioneering partnerships among investors, local communities, conservationists and scientists can combine conservation efforts, sustainable development and financial investment to the benefit of all.

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

Related article: <http://www.meed.com/the-dugong-seagrass-and-coastal-communities-initiative-launched-at-save-our-sirenians-event-in-abu-dhabi/3127612.article>

Eelgrass restoration is a great marine success story (VA, USA)

25 February 2012, Delmarva Now

The reintroduction of eelgrass into Virginia's coastal bays - a collaborative effort among the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, the University of Virginia, and The Nature Conservancy - is one of the great success stories in marine restoration.

This week, a special theme section of the leading journal Marine Ecology Progress Series features 9 articles that describe the 15-year restoration process and explain how the resulting "state change" from bare seafloor sediments to lush eelgrass meadows has led to a healthier and more vibrant ecosystem overall. A final article, however, cautions that the restored meadows are vulnerable to global warming.

Professor Robert "JJ" Orth - co-editor of the theme section and head of the seagrass restoration and monitoring program at VIMS - notes that two factors have combined to make Virginia's coastal bays an ideal spot for restoring

eelgrass and studying the resulting ecosystem changes. First, the bays are part of the Virginia Coast Reserve. Second, the reserve's relatively pristine waters are a major reason for the success of the eelgrass restoration effort.

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

Related article: <http://www.newswise.com/articles/seagrass-restoration-in-virginia-s-coastal-bays-proving-successful-studies-show>

Sri Lanka protects dugongs under Convention on Migratory Species (Sri Lanka)

15 February 2012, UNEP

Sri Lanka has pledged its support to the long-term survival of the dugongs and the protection of their critical seagrass habitats by becoming a signatory state to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs and Their Habitats throughout their Range (Dugong MOU). The Dugong MOU operates under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). The Secretariat to the Dugong MOU is funded and hosted by the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi on behalf of the Government of the United Arab Emirates.

Dugongs are found in warm coastal and island waters of over 40 countries in the Indo-Pacific. In Sri Lanka, the species is known to occur from Colombo to Jaffna, particularly in the coastal waters of Gulf of Mannar-Palk Bay region, which have sea grass beds and mangrove forests. Although there is limited data, dugongs were reported to be both abundant and widely distributed along coastal waters of Sri Lanka up until the late in the 20th century. However over the past 30 years, dugong populations have declined dramatically and sightings are now rare in most areas of Sri Lanka. The dugong has been given high levels of legal protection in South Asia through national legislation in countries including Sri Lanka and India.

In Sri Lanka, the UNEP/CMS Office - Abu Dhabi is currently working with the Department of Wildlife Conservation, IUCN Sri Lanka and Dilmah Conservation to conduct surveys which will improve knowledge of dugong distribution, abundance, and their "hotspots" of main threats particularly from incidental captures by net fisheries. More projects are planned with the aim of facilitating national and trans-boundary action on conservation of dugongs and their habitats, enhancing regional collaboration and finding incentives to change towards more dugong-friendly practices.

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

<http://www.meed.com/sri-lanka-protects-dugongs-under-convention-on-migratory-species/3126215.article>

<http://gulftoday.ae/portal/b2a9ea23-dc05-4bc2-9640-f812824a2993.aspx>

Put a stop to dugong waste: Elders (QLD, Australia)

10 February 2012, Torres News

Traditional owners in the Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) have spoken out against selling dugong meat and against wasteful hunting practices. Elder, traditional owner and retired senior ranger Meun Lifu said he raised the issue at a recent meeting in Cairns with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

Indigenous rangers to patrol poaching in Cairns region (QLD, Australia)

10 February 2012, The Cairns Post

Six indigenous rangers will work with traditional owners in the next few months to ensure the long-term sustainability of turtles and dugongs in the Far North and across the state.

The new rangers – expected to work primarily in the Far North – would be tasked with examining allegations of illegal poaching and collecting evidence for prosecution, Environment Minister Vicky Darling said in Cairns yesterday. The indigenous rangers will also share their expertise on species management, track turtle and dugong populations and conduct habitat surveys, Ms Darling said.

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

26 million years of sea cows

04 February 2012, Examiner.com

Paleontologist and biologists reported the first of its kind analysis of sea cow form and lineage dating back to the Cenozoic era at the Public Library of Science web site on February 3, 2012. This research is the first to define emphatically the iterative evolution of multispecies communities, a phenomenon unparalleled in extant sirenian ecology.

The present extant communities of sea cows in Florida, Mexico, and India are defined through time in a scrupulous manner that examines all the known ancient sites that sea cows once inhabited.

Sea cows at one time inhabited Earth from North Carolina to the Philippines with a variety of distinct species appearing to have lived side by side but yet evolving separate and distinct physical traits. The demise of sea cow populations is highly related to sea grass availability as a source of food and shelter.

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

Grassroots check of our coastal waters (SA, Australia)

04 February 2012, Adelaide Now

A study by the state's environmental watchdog will reveal for the first time our coastal water health. The study will include the dire state of vital seagrasses along stretches of our coastline.

In what will be South Australia's first comprehensive water quality report card, the Environmental Protection Authority is collating data on the health and density of seagrasses in Gulf St Vincent, Spencer Gulf and the Sir Joseph Banks Islands region. The findings will be released in coming months but early results have revealed important seagrass is still being lost, contributing to water turbidity and cloudiness at many of our recreational beaches.

EPA senior marine scientist Sam Gaylard said most of the damage was done in the 1980s and '90s, with 5000ha killed off by sewage sludge before the Glenelg and Port Adelaide sewage treatment works closed in 1993. But continual stormwater, waste water and industrial discharges had made it difficult for the grasses to regrow along the metropolitan coast and were still causing losses, he said. Seagrass was also suffering from algae growth along the eastern coast of Yorke Peninsula.

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

Seagrass 'tens of thousands of years old'

02 February 2011, BBC News

Meadows of seagrass found in the Mediterranean Sea are likely to be thousands of years old, a study shows. Researchers found genetically identical samples of *Posidonia oceanica* up to 15km apart, which suggested that the species was extremely long-lived. The team added that the organism - which provides food and shelter for many species - is under threat from climate change. They report their findings in the open access journal Plos One.

The seagrass is "partially clonal", explained co-author Sophie Arnaud-Haond from the French Research Institute for the exploration of the Sea (Ifremer). Asexual reproduction, such as cloning, means an individual organism's genetic identity is preserved and passed on from generation to generation, whereas the offspring of sexual organisms is made up of genetic material from both parents.

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

Related articles: <http://www.livescience.com/18253-ancient-seagrass-clones-oldest-life.html>

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/46228332/ns/technology_and_science-science/

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/science/95145-seagrass-tens-of-thousands-of-years-old->

<http://io9.com/5882473/this-seagrass-could-be-a-hundred-thousand-years-old>

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn21433-patch-of-seagrass-is-worlds-oldest-living-organism.html>

http://www.upi.com/Science_News/2012/02/06/Words-oldest-living-thing-studied/UPI-90121328568947/

<http://theconversation.edu.au/100-000-year-old-seagrass-could-be-the-worlds-oldest-organism-5212>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/9066393/Ancient-seagrass-Oldest-living-thing-on-earth-discovered-in-Mediterranean-Sea.html>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/9066392/Seagrass-Factbox-Earths-oldest-living-things.html>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2012/feb/07/mediterranean-seagrass-thousands-years-old>

<http://www.thespoof.com/news/spoof.cfm?headline=s5i104276>

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/02/120207152545.htm>

<http://www.inquisitr.com/191926/oldest-living-thing-discovered-by-scientists-is-relatively-ordinary/>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2098176/Worlds-oldest-living-organism-200-00-year-old-seagrass.html?ITO=1490>

<http://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/seagrass-oldest-living-thing-on-earth-20120209-1rrqf.html>

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/oldest-living-organism-in-the-mediterranean.aspx?pageID=238&nID=13302&NewsCatID=374>

<http://www.popsci.com.au/science/aussie-scientists-declare-200-000-year-old-seagrass-world-s-oldest-lifeform>

<http://gogreece.about.com/b/2012/02/09/oldest-living-thing-in-greece-may-be-poseidon.htm>

<http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/295235/20120208/oldest-living-thing-earth-posidonia-oceanica-organisms.htm>

http://www.thirdage.com/news/oldest-living-thing-on-earth-could-be-seagrass_02-09-2012

<http://www.parramattasun.com.au/news/national/national/general/seagrass-oldest-living-thing-on-earth/2450245.aspx>

<http://www.newspakistan.pk/2012/02/14/Australian-scientists-discovered-the-oldest-living-thing-on-earth/>

<http://www.onenewsnow.com/Perspectives/Default.aspx?id=1535788>

Okinawa rejects Tokyo environmental assessment on Futenma project (Japan)

21 February 2012, by Travis J. Tritten and Chiyo Sumida, Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Okinawa government on Monday formally rejected Tokyo's assessment that building a new offshore U.S. Marine Corps airfield would not harm the local environment.

For more than five years, the U.S. and Japan have been trying to push through a plan to move the Marine base from urban Ginowan by reclaiming land on the northern part of the island for the construction of two V-shaped runways to be used by Marine helicopters and airplanes. In December, the Japan Ministry of Defense gave the U.S.-Japan project an environmental stamp of approval, and both governments were hoping the assessment would pave the way for construction work to begin.

But in his rejection of the plan this week, Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima said the toll of building the new airfield had been underestimated and the project could devastate marine wildlife and rain noise pollution onto the surrounding rural coastal community. The governor listed 175 concerns he said were not addressed in the Tokyo assessment, including threats to the endangered dugong, a sea mammal similar to a manatee, and the noise of MV-22 Ospreys that would operate out of the new Marine Corps air station.

Full story and source: <http://www.stripes.com/news/okinawa-rejects-tokyo-environmental-assessment-on-futenma-project-1.169229>

Cable between Mallorca and Menorca threatens seagrass (Spain)

14 February 2012, EuroWeekly

An underground electric cable between Mallorca and Menorca will threaten seabed meadows, according to the Balearic Environment Department. Specifically Neptune Grass, a seagrass that is only found in the Mediterranean Sea. It forms large underwater meadows that are an important part of the ecosystem.

Currently this species is in decline and occupies an area of only three per cent of the basin. The presence of Neptune Grass can be detected by the masses of decomposing leaves on beaches, often in the shape of a ball.

The 68.5km cable between the two islands is connected via substations in Arta and Cuitadella. The Environmental Department says that a study needs to be carried out and solutions provided to ensure that the Neptune Grass meadows are not damaged. The project will cost more than €34 million and is set to complete in 2014.

Full story and source: <http://www.euroweeklynews.com/news/mallorca/91254-cable-between-mallorca-and-menorca-threatens-seagrass>

Destructive Indian River Lagoon algae bloom likely to stay north of Treasure Coast sea grass, scientist says (FL, USA)

08 February 2012, by Jim Ash, Treasure Coast Newspapers

FORT PIERCE — A devastating "super bloom" of algae that may have wiped out tens of thousands of acres of vital sea grasses in the Indian River Lagoon is not likely to threaten the Treasure Coast, a marine scientist predicted Wednesday.

Lori Morris, a sea grass expert with the St. Johns River Water Management District, said the unprecedented bloom, which turned portions of the 156-mile ecosystem bright green for much of the past year, is abating and not likely to creep south of Melbourne. She is part of a team of university and government scientists studying the bloom and ways to prevent future outbreaks. It was first spotted in March in the Banana River and Mosquito Lagoon and spread as far south as Melbourne. Scientists are still searching for a cause, but suspect back-to-back years of extremely cold weather and a drought that pushed salinity levels to as high as 40 parts per thousand. That led to an explosion in the population of a phytoplankton called "Resultor," Morris said.

Sea grass coverage, although thin and dying out in more developed areas of the lagoon system, was increasing for the past 17 years, until the outbreak reversed the trend. Morris and other district scientists have developed a formula that shows that each acre of sea grass in the lagoon has an economic value of \$10,000 per year.

Full story and source: <http://www.tcpalm.com/news/2012/feb/08/destructive-indian-river-lagoon-algae-bloom-to/>

PUBLICATIONS:

WSA 2012 seagrass calendar

12 seagrass genera for 12 months, keeping us informed on when each genera was first described and how old they are getting.

Calendar concept, design, and layout by Giuseppe di Carlo of the World Seagrass Association (wsa.seagrassonline.org) and Jane Thomas of the Integration and Application Network (www.ian.umces.edu).

The calendar is available in PDF and can be easily printed in colour or B&W, in both Letter and A4 format, easy to store and travel with.

More info... <http://wsa.seagrassonline.org/blog/archives/116>

To download the Letter version of the calendar

http://wsa.seagrassonline.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/WSA_calendar_2012.pdf

To download the A4 version of the calendar

http://wsa.seagrassonline.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/WSA_calendar_2012_A4.pdf

GALLERY

Pulau Semakau (Singapore): 19 February 2012 http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery_Feb_12.html

We are lucky to have Siti explain the intricacies of monitoring, and highlight the seagrass species we might find on Semakau. They can be rather tricky! The water is still high and I had a lot of trouble finding the stakes. Oh dear, we lost two of them. Fortunately, there was still one and we used it to set up the other two. Thanks to the presence of many regulars who guided the new ones, we got the monitoring done smoothly. The *Enhalus acoroides* are blooming today! The water was dotted with the tiny white male pollen that float. At the water surface, the male pollen meet the female flowers! And pollination magic happens!.

CONFERENCES

ICRS 2012 (Cairns, Australia from 9 – 13 July 2012)

12th International Coral Reef Symposium (<http://www.icrs2012.com>)

In July 2012, the world's leading natural scientists, resource managers, conservationists, economists, educators and students will meet together in Cairns, Australia for the 12th International Coral Reef symposium.

This major international scientific conference is held every four years and provides the latest knowledge and leading edge technologies about coral reefs and reef environments worldwide.

This 5 day event will bring together 2,500 people from some 80 countries, to communicate their science and hear the latest advances from the international experts in coral reef science. This research and findings will be fundamental in informing international and national policies and protocols in the conservation and sustainable use of coral reefs and the coral reef environment.

Mini-Symposium: Seagrasses and seagrass ecosystems (http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/conferences/ICRS2012/Flyer_ICRS2012_Seagrass.pdf)

Seagrass meadows are an important component of tropical coastal waters. They are part of the complex ecosystem that supports the productivity of coral reefs and reef environments. There is evidence that seagrass populations are declining and this will impact on associated ecosystems. Our knowledge of tropical seagrass systematics, ecology, trends, connectivity and the anthropogenic threats to seagrass communities has improved greatly in the last decade. The symposium will bring together recent findings to enhance our understanding of seagrass associated with coral reef environments.

Important dates:

1 March 2012 - Early bird registration closes

1 March 2012 - Manuscripts for Proceedings due

30 March 2012 - Photographic competition closes

International Seagrass Biology Workshop ISBW10 (Brazil, late Oct/early Nov 2012)

The 10th International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW10) will take place in Brazil in November, 2012. ISBW10 will be hosted by Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro and the Instituto Biodiversidade Marinha. ISBW10 convenor is Dr Joel Creed. Further information will be posted when available.

SEAGRASS-WATCH Workshops 2012

For more information: <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/training.html#workshop12>

SEAGRASS-WATCH on YouTube

Seagrass: Pastures of the sea <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66Y5vgswj20> or

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

Presentation on what seagrasses are and why they are important (over 20,000 views to date)

...seagrass matters blog

World Seagrass Association blog <http://wsa.seagrassonline.org/blog/>

Keep up to date on what's happening around the world from the WSA with regular updates from WSA President Dr Giuseppe Di Carlo and *notes from the field* by Siti Yaakub.

FROM HQ

Past E-bulletins <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/publications.html#ebulletin>

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>

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