

Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin



30 June 2014

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IN THIS BULLETIN

NEWS	1
Acoustic tags to be used to monitor dugong behaviour (Thailand)	1
Why are our sea prairies under serious threat? (UK)	2
Researchers dive into dugong health project in Queensland's Moreton Bay (Australia)	2
Great Barrier Reef water quality remains poor: report (Australia)	2
Great Barrier Reef health: Reports shows UNESCO requests met, Queensland Government says (Australia)	3
Watching the seagrass grow (Australia)	3
Sandbags used to boost seagrass regeneration in trial off Adelaide coast (Australia)	3
Kuala Lawas – last frontier for dugong conservation (Borneo)	4
Undergraduates embark on summer "ZENternships" (USA)	4
Not all options for dredge dumping considered: scientist (Australia)	4
RBS joins move to shun Abbot Point (Australia)	4
Cockburn crab fishery dies (Australia)	5
Palmer's Halifax Bay permit not renewed (Australia)	5
MP says new ports plan won't stop Trinity Inlet dredging (Australia)	5
Give Hong Kong's green turtles a fighting chance (Hong Kong)	5
Five Queensland mega ports win approval, including Abbot Point (Australia)	6
Dredge spoil dumping near reef approved (Australia)	6
Protecting the dugong and Malaysia's marine habitats (Malaysia)	6
GALLERY	7
CONFERENCES	7
The 11th International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW11) (China, 7-10 November 2014)	7
SEAGRASS-WATCH on YouTube	7
...seagrass matters blog	7
World Seagrass Association blog	7
FROM HQ	7
Past E-bulletins	7
Frequently Asked Questions	7
Seagrass-Watch Magazine	7
Seagrass-Watch Shop	7
Virtual Herbarium	7
Giveaways	7
Future sampling dates	7
Handy Seagrass Links	7

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

NEWS

Acoustic tags to be used to monitor dugong behaviour (Thailand)

22 June 2014, *The Nation*

Japanese and Thai marine biology researchers plan to jointly monitor dugong behaviour via acoustic tags in Trang - home to Thailand's largest dugong population - in the hope of encouraging marine-life conservation. Dr Kanjana Adulyanukosol, director of Marine and Coastal Resources Research and Development Centre (Upper Gulf of Thailand), and Kyoto University marine biologist Dr Kotaro Ichikawa went to Banbatuputeh School at Koh Libong, Trang on Tuesday to meet locals and prominent officials in order to explain the use of acoustic tags on dugongs.

Researchers have spent 10 years investigating the topic, with experiments set to start in November and implementation of the project set for the following February. Researchers said the tags would not harm the dugongs as they would be tethered to the animals with a rubber rope with a built-in weak link. The line, which is approximately 30 metres, can be broken to safeguard dugongs should the lines get tangled or they will eventually fall off in five days. Capturing the dugongs to attach the tags will only take up to five minutes.

Five dugongs will be monitored over 14 days so that we have a better understanding of their habitat and daily routines. The information will be used to develop necessary measures for dugong conservation. Trang has between 125-135 dugongs, with over 10 mother-child couplets. Kanjana hopes that Koh Libong locals will help protect dugongs. While she said she did not know why people killed the mammal, she reminded locals that Thailand had environmental protection laws covering dugongs.

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

Why are our sea prairies under serious threat? (UK)

18 June 2014, WalesOnline

Seagrass meadows, the so-called "prairies of the sea", which along with kelp forests and horse mussel beds are vital for the existence of fish such as cod, are seriously under threat. That is the warning from Swansea University marine systems expert Richard Unsworth and his colleagues at the seaside campus who have done extensive research on this important, hidden worlds. Now, an international group led by Dr Unsworth, including many world renowned scientists, has summarised the present knowledge about the challenges seagrass meadows are facing now and in the future.

Their work has been included in a special "emergency issue" of the journal Marine Pollution Bulletin entitled Seagrass Meadows in a Globally Changing Environment. Dr Unsworth said: "These prairies of the sea are critically important for many fish species throughout their life cycle, and in many countries these meadows form expansive fishing grounds. Dr Unsworth explains in the special issue of the journal that world wide there are an estimated 380,000 square miles of seagrass which also provides protection against coastal erosion.

Swansea University biosciences expert Dr Jim Bull, says his studies from the Isles of Scilly show the importance of maintaining long-term monitoring programmes to understand how experimental results translate to the natural setting. They also highlight the value of long-term ecological surveillance through its potential to inform conservation. The work by the researchers warns in particular that seagrass meadows are currently being subjected to poor water quality (particularly excessive nutrients) and extreme climatic variability.

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

Researchers dive into dugong heath project in Queensland's Moreton Bay (Australia)

13 June 2014, ABC Local

A marine researcher on Queensland's Gold Coast says conditions for dugongs in Moreton Bay have improved after the environment was badly affected by Brisbane's 2011 floods. Sea World on the Gold Coast, the University of Queensland, and the Sydney Sea Life Aquarium are checking dugong health in a project that started seven years ago. Up to 20 dugongs will be captured to carry out the health assessment, with Sea World welcoming a federal grant of \$250,000 for whale and dolphin research.

Sea World's director of marine sciences, Trevor Long, says issues like boat strike are still a problem. "There is about 1,000 animals and the population's reasonably sustainable but we've got to make sure that everyone understands how these animals use the bay," he said. "We'd like to look at a health assessment that can be established that we can look at the way that we do that and be able to continue it into the future so we can see trends of health that either relate to environmental impacts or either human impacts."

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

Great Barrier Reef water quality remains poor: report (Australia)

12 June 2014, Sydney Morning Herald

A major report card shows water quality in the inshore of the Great Barrier Reef remains poor despite reductions in pesticides and nutrients flowing on to the reef. The report shows in the overall Great Barrier Reef section, the inshore reef "remained poor". Inshore seagrass showed "some signs of recovery" in some areas, improving from "very poor" to "poor".

In the Cape York section, the overall marine condition improved from "poor" to "moderate". One southern seagrass bed in this section was in "poor condition." In the Wet Tropics area, seagrass meadows declined from "poor" to "very poor". Coral reefs declined from "moderate" to "poor". In the Burdekin region, the overall inshore area remained "poor", seagrass meadows improved from "very poor" to "poor", while water quality remained moderate.

In the Mackay-Whitsunday area, inshore seagrass meadows remained "very poor", the inshore marine environment remained "poor" and coral reefs remained in a "moderate" condition. Further south in the Fitzroy River section, coral

reefs declined from "poor to very poor", overall inshore conditions remained "poor", while "inshore seagrass meadows" and the overall inshore environment was described as remaining "poor".

Queensland's Greens Senator Larissa Waters said she was pleased there were some signs of improvements to sections of the reef. However Senator Waters said she was very concerned that the Reef Rescue program, that helped farmers control nutrient flowing into rivers, had been scrapped in the federal budget. Senator Waters suggested the \$40 million that was funding the Reef Rescue scheme had been used to set up the Federal Government's new Reef Trust. "What they have done with the Reef Rescue program is turn that in to the Reef Trust," she said. Senator Waters said mining companies would use the scheme attempt to "offset" any damage that was caused in specific environments. "And of course seagrass offsets are a farce and there is not a scientist who says you can do it effectively," she said.

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

Great Barrier Reef health: Reports shows UNESCO requests met, Queensland Government says (Australia)

12 June ABC Online

The Queensland Government has fulfilled all of UNESCO's requests to improve the health of Great Barrier Reef, the state's Environment Minister Andrew Powell has said. Mr Powell said a report, which is due to be released today, would reveal an improvement in water quality in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

In May, UNESCO outlined its concerns over the decision to dispose of dredge spoil near the reef. UNESCO has recommended the World Heritage Committee consider adding the reef to the World Heritage in Danger list in 2015, unless the Government further protect it. Mr Powell will take the State Government's report card to a UNESCO meeting in Doha later this month, where he will argue the reef should not be put on the endangered list.

Mr Powell told 612 ABC Brisbane today the suggestion the reef was under threat from port development was a clever marketing campaign run by "green" groups. "What I'm going there to convince them of is that the real causes of concern for the reef are storms and cyclones, crown-of-thorns starfish, coral bleaching, and we're addressing those through the investment that we're putting into it," he said.

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

Watching the seagrass grow (Australia)

11 June 2014, Western Cape Bulletin

The Nanum Wungthim Rangers have just completed further training on seagrass monitoring with Louise Johns from James Cook University, Seagrass-Watch (SGW) team. Ranger Coordinator, Matt Gillis said the Rangers and Seagrass-Watch have been monitoring seagrass at a permanent monitoring site within the Embley River on the northern side of the river in Napranum for the past ten years. The rangers have found changes in data over the past 12 months. "The seagrass in the Embley River has impacts from port development and land runoff," Mr Gillis said.

The rangers gain skills at the workshops in seagrass identification, the importance of seagrass, animals that use the seagrass, and the distribution of seagrass around the world. These skills are used when monitoring seagrass and include learning about percentage cover, sediment composition and data collection. "Seagrass is essential for the survival of the dugong and species of sea turtle that graze on it," Mr Gillis said. This extensive seagrass community provides habitat for juvenile fish and prawn species that are important to commercial, recreational and the local community. There is evidence showing the trails that dugong leave behind on the Embley River.

All data collected by the rangers is sent to the Seagrass-Watch team and added to the Seagrass-Watch data base which can be viewed at www.seagrasswatch.org. It is found that the seagrass changes over time and even within a year the rangers have seen increases in seagrass cover and changes in species of seagrasses.

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

Sandbags used to boost seagrass regeneration in trial off Adelaide coast (Australia)

04 June 2014 ABC Online

About 2,000 sandbags are being dropped into waters off Grange in a project aimed at boosting Adelaide's seagrass. Scientists from the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) are doing the work, after previous trials in the same area showed promise. The sandbags are being dropped from the SARDI research boat the Ngerin across two areas of the seabed and the divers will check in six months to see whether there is new growth. In areas where the hessian bags have been spread previously, thriving seagrass has been found more than five years later. It is estimated more than 5,200 hectares of seagrass have been lost along the Adelaide coast in the past half century. Factors blamed include wastewater and stormwater run-off and more industry and other coastal development.

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

Kuala Lawas – last frontier for dugong conservation (Borneo)

01 June 2014, *The Borneo Post*

They are believed to have been at the origin of mermaid legends when spotted swimming from a distance. Now the remaining populations of this seemingly clumsy sea mammal called dugong, commonly known as sea cow, are at serious risk of extinction. Many countries throughout the world are making every effort to protect this elusive marine mammal. Sarawak too is moving into the same direction – to save the species. The protected waters and plentiful seagrass meadows are perfect for the dugong.

The dugong is listed as one of the totally protected species in Sarawak under the Wild Life Protection Ordinance 1998. Today, this large marine herbivore can still be found in Sarawak waters, especially in Kuala Lawas, assures Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC). Its deputy general manager (Protected Areas and Biodiversity Conservation Division) Oswald Braken Tisen said the state government was committed to ensure the continued existence of the dugong in the area for posterity. And in response to the government's commitment, he added, SFC, in collaboration with a few higher learning institutions and international organisations, had taken some proactive actions to protect and conserve the seabed off Kuala Lawas, one of the feeding grounds for dugongs and turtles. In fact, Braken pointed out, seagrass and dugong conservation in Kuala Lawas was initiated by the Forest Department back in 1994 after it monitored the movement of turtles.

In 2011, to enhance the seagrass and dugong conservation in Kuala Lawas, SFC organised the Southeast Asia regional workshop on the dugong in Lawas, funded by the UN Environment Programme and Convention on Migratory Species (UNEP/CMS). From the workshop, Malaysia requested for funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to support the conservation of marine biodiversity and ecosystem in the country. He said efforts to conserve the seagrass and dugong conservation in the area did not stop there, adding that SFC and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) last year. Braken said SFC had decided to work closely with UMT because the latter is known for its marine conservation work. He hoped from such collaboration, UMT would become a platform for other agencies to participate in the conservation of seagrass and dugong in the whole area off Kuala Lawas and in Brunei Bay.

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

Undergraduates embark on summer "ZENternships" (USA)

24 June 2014, *William and Mary News*

Eight William & Mary undergraduates are engaged in a unique new research program led by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) that combines classroom experience with summer internships across the globe. The two-part program is a part of the *Zostera* Experimental Network (ZEN), a collaborative worldwide project in which teams of scientists are using identical field methods to study the structure and function of eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) ecosystems at coastal sites in 11 countries from Korea to Portugal. Funded by the National Science Foundation, ZEN aims to better understand how and why seagrass ecosystems—important nursery and feeding grounds for many marine animals—might differ in their responses to changes in climate and biodiversity.

During the spring semester, the students completed Seagrass Ecosystem Ecology, a course led by VIMS Professor and ZEN's Principal Investigator Emmett Duffy and VIMS Ph.D. student Jonathan Lefcheck. Held on the VIMS campus in Gloucester Point, the course included lectures on marine and seagrass ecology, reading and discussion of relevant literature, and training for the lab and field methods to be used during the summer research projects. Also contributing to the instruction were colleagues at the University of California, Davis and San Diego State University.

Full story: <http://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2014/undergraduates-embark-on-summer-zenternships123.php>

Not all options for dredge dumping considered: scientist (Australia)

20 June 2014, *Radio National, ABC*

The Commonwealth and Queensland governments are standing firm in their decision to allow the dumping of dredge spoil onto the Great Barrier Reef, despite international criticism. UNESCO's World Heritage Committee has granted Australia a 12 month extension to improve its management of the reef to avoid it being listed as 'in danger'. A leading tropical water research scientist has now challenged Queensland Environment Minister Andrew Powell's assertion that all options for dumping dredge spoil have been fully explored. Listen online

Full story: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/alternative-to-dumping-dredge-spoil-scientist/5537684>

RBS joins move to shun Abbot Point (Australia)

09 June 2014, *The Australian*

The Royal Bank of Scotland last night joined Deutsche Bank and HSBC in publicly ruling out financing of the controversial Abbot Point coal terminal near Bowen, Queensland. The terminal will export coal from the nine mega coalmines planned for Queensland's Galilee Basin. In a letter to campaign organisations last night the bank wrote: "RBS is not involved in the Abbot Point expansion project and has no plans to be involved in the future."

RBS's move comes as UNESCO's World Heritage Committee meets in Doha to consider listing of the Reef as World Heritage in Danger. "It is heartening to see global financial institutions such as the RBS take leadership and reject investment in projects that will damage the reef," Felicity Wishart, Great Barrier Reef campaigner for the Australian Marine Conservation Society, said. "The health of the Great Barrier Reef is already suffering due to poor water quality. Port expansions would mean millions of tonnes of seabed being dredged and dumped in the Reef's waters — sediment would cloud the water, damaging seagrass and coral, making matters far worse."

Full story: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/financial-services/rbs-joins-move-to-shun-abbot-point-financing/story-fn91wd6x-1226959748115>

Cockburn crab fishery dies (Australia)

08 June 2014, *The West Australian*

Concerns are mounting over the condition of ecologically sensitive Cockburn Sound after the collapse of the waterway's once-abundant crab fishery for the second time in five years. The fishery's crash has coincided with a report from the sound's watchdog pointing to an alarming fall in the density and coverage of seagrass - a key measure of the system's overall health.

In its annual report into the state of the waterway, the Cockburn Sound Management Council said the sound's condition was going backwards across a range of measures. It said that though unusually high water temperatures over recent years was likely to have played a key role in seagrass decline, the trend was worrying and warranted further investigation.

Full story: <https://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/business/a/24191240/cockburn-crab-fishery-dies/>

Palmer's Halifax Bay permit not renewed (Australia)

07 June 2014, *The Australian*

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has refused to renew a permit for Clive Palmer to keep an emergency overflow pipeline from his Townsville nickel refinery into World Heritage waters in Halifax Bay. Mr Palmer has responded with fresh legal action against the authority and the federal government, challenging the validity of a 2001 decision to include Halifax Bay within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area.

Mr Palmer's permit expired last year and on May 22 this year GBRMPA refused a request for a new permit for the pipe on the grounds that it did not provide any reason for the structure to be in the marine park and there were no future plans for it. Questions were raised about whether the pipe was structurally sound and fit for the purpose.

The Yabulu refinery was forced to suspend operations briefly in April after heavy rains filled the tailings ponds, causing toxic sludge to spill into the Great Barrier Reef waters. At the time, Queensland Environment Minister Andrew Powell said he would oppose any formal application from Mr Palmer to channel the tailings through the outfall pipe into Halifax Bay. Federal government scientists have previously described a major discharge from the ponds to the ecosystem of Halifax Bay as "similar to the daily discharge of treated sewage from a city of seven million".

Full story: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/policy/clive-palmers-halifax-bay-permit-not-renewed/story-e6frg6xf-1226946319512#>

MP says new ports plan won't stop Trinity Inlet dredging (Australia)

06 June 2014, *ABC Online*

The Member for Cairns says the State Government's new Queensland Ports Strategy will not jeopardise plans to develop the city's shipping channel by dredging Trinity Inlet. The strategy prohibits dredging near the Great Barrier Reef for port developments for 10 years outside of Brisbane, Gladstone, Abbot Point, Hay Point, Mackay and Townsville.

However, Gavin King says a loophole protects dredging proposals already under assessment. He denies the Government's approach is sneaky. The state budget includes \$12 million for environmental studies for the Cairns shipping project.

Full story: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-06-06/mp-says-new-ports-plan-wont-stop-trinity-inlet/5504786>

Give Hong Kong's green turtles a fighting chance (Hong Kong)

06 June 2014, *South China Morning Post*

Seven species of sea turtle inhabit the world's tropical and subtropical waters. Five species of sea turtle can be found in Hong Kong. One of them, the green turtle, actually nests here. This giant used to nest on the beaches of several offshore islands, and the eggs were harvested and sold by local villagers. Now, only Sham Wan on Lamma Island supports a very small breeding population.

Green turtles migrate long distances from their breeding sites to feeding grounds, which increases their chance of coming into harm's way. Satellite tracking by Hong Kong's Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department shows turtles can travel several hundred kilometres from Hong Kong, to waters near Hainan Island, eastern Guangdong and Vietnam. Adults feed mainly on algae and seagrass but also eat some invertebrates.

Hong Kong's nesting green turtle population now probably consists of just a few adult females. Some years may see zero nesting activity. In 1999, the government established Sham Wan as a restricted area, with no entry allowed without a permit during the nesting season. The fisheries department also patrols the nesting beach, and when natural incubation of the eggs is deemed too risky, artificial incubation will be carried out. These efforts have resulted in baby turtles being hatched successfully either naturally or artificially. However, the weakest link in conserving this species here is that the coastal waters adjacent to the nesting beach at Sham Wan are not protected and are subject to disturbance from people engaging in water sports.

Full story: <http://www.scmp.com/comment/article/1526646/give-hong-kongs-green-turtles-fighting-chance-survive>

Five Queensland mega ports win approval, including Abbot Point (Australia)

05 June 2014, The Guardian

Five mega ports will be allowed along the Queensland coast, mainly in areas near the Great Barrier Reef. Abbot Point, one of the world's biggest coal terminals, has been declared a port development priority area. The declaration comes only six months after green groups lost a battle to stop 3million cubic metres of dredge spoil from being dumped in the reef marine park boundaries. The North Queensland Conservation Council is taking action at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, with a preliminary hearing set down for August.

As well as at Abbot Point, expansions will be allowed at other ports adjacent to the reef, including Gladstone, Hay Point, Mackay and Townsville. Brisbane has also been earmarked for major growth. Queensland's deputy premier, Jeff Seeney, said dredging outside these priority port areas would be banned under the new strategy. But Queensland Greens senator Larissa Waters said the new "faux restriction" on dredging was useless. "It won't apply to any of the damaging dredging already applied for which is the very dredging that Unesco was concerned about," she said, adding dredging would continue at 20 ports.

Full story: <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/jun/05/five-queensland-mega-ports-win-approval>

Dredge spoil dumping near reef approved (Australia)

05 June 2014, The Australian

The government body that protects the Great Barrier Reef has approved the dumping of more than 370,000 cubic metres of dredge spoil in the marine park. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has issued a permit to allow a port authority to dump the spoil as part of a dredging project at Hay Point coal port in central Queensland. The decision has angered conservation groups, and comes only months after the authority gave the green light for three million tonnes of spoil to be dumped as part of a project to expand the nearby Abbot Point coal port.

The United Nation's environment arm has said it regrets the federal government's decision to approve the Abbot Point dredging project, and has raised concerns about the overall health of the reef. UNESCO is expected to discuss whether to list the reef as a World Heritage site "in danger" when it meets next week.

The Ports Corporation of Queensland wants to carry out the works at Hay Point to make it easier for ships to access the port and to increase capacity. It's estimated 378,400 cubic metres of dredge spoil will be dumped within the marine park over three years. The dredging will be carried out within the marine park and the World Heritage Area. GBRMPA says no hard coral reefs are in the approved dredge disposal area. It also says the permit imposes a number of conditions to minimise potential effects on the marine park, including the Whitsundays, which is north of Hay Point.

Full story: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/latest-news/dredge-spoil-dumping-near-reef-approved/story-fn3dxiwe-1226944769257>

Protecting the dugong and Malaysia's marine habitats (Malaysia)

Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom - Department for International Development

Dr Louisa Ponnampalam is a 2004 Commonwealth Scholar from Malaysia, who studied for a PhD in Habitat Use and Conservation of Small Dolphins, at the University Marine Biological Station Millport. She has been awarded a 2014 Pew Fellowship in Marine Conservation to conduct new research on Malaysia's dugong population. The colonies of dugongs in Louisa's selected area of Malaysia are considered to be critically endangered.

Louisa will focus on the islands off the eastern coast of Johor in the Peninsular Malaysia. Louisa's grant will be used to identify the most frequented areas of the remaining dugong population. Locating these habitats is the first step in protecting them. Recipients of the Pew Fellows Marine Conservation grants have a three-year period to conduct projects targeting conservation issues. For Louisa, dugong habitat protection is the first priority.

Full story: <http://cscuk.dfid.gov.uk/2014/05/protecting-the-dugong-and-malysias-marine-habitats/>

GALLERY

Magnetic Island: 13 June 2014 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Archer Point: 28 April 2014 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

CONFERENCES

The 11th International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW11) (China, 7-10 November 2014)

Declining seagrasses in a changing world.

The International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW) gives a good chance for the scientists working on various aspects of seagrass ecosystems to come together and discuss their latest achievements. The ISBW11 will be held from 7-10 November 2014 at Sanya city, Hainan Province, China, organized by South China Sea Institute of Oceanology, Chinese Academy of Sciences. ISBW11 convenor is Dr Xiaoping Haung.

The following symposia themes were chosen for ISBW11:

- 1) Key Ecological Processes;
- 2) Ecosystem Vulnerability and Resilience;
- 3) Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services;
- 4) Management and Restoration.

Important dates:

- 10 August 2014 - The last day of abstract submission
- 01 September 2014 - End of early bird payment
- 25 September 2014 - Notification of abstract acceptance
- 15 October 2014 - End of online payment
- 25 October 2014 - Notification of final list of participants to the ISBW11
- 07 November 2014 - ISBW11 begins

for more information, visit <http://isbw11.csp.escience.cn/dct/page/1>

SEAGRASS-WATCH on YouTube

Seagrass: Pastures of the sea <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66Y5vgsuj20> or <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/seagrass.html>

Presentation on what seagrasses are and why they are important (over 33,589 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>

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