

# Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin



**30 November 2014**

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## **Turtles starving to death in wake of Queensland cyclones, floods (QLD, Australia)**

27 November 2014, by Matt Watson, ABC Online

Marine wildlife such as turtles and dugongs are still starving to death as a result of Cyclone Larry, Cyclone Yasi and the Brisbane floods, researchers at James Cook University in far north Queensland say. Queensland Government figures show more than 5,000 turtles had washed up dead or dying onto Queensland's beaches since 2010. There had also been more than 350 cases of stranded dugong in the past four years.

Dr Jennie Gilbert said those natural disasters killed many of Queensland's seagrass and it was yet to grow back. She was concerned for the long-term future of green turtles after recent stranded cases in Cairns. Dr Gilbert said the university had conducted several examinations of dead animals to find out the cause of death. "We've just done actually six necropsies today," she said. "Three of those turtles were suffering from starvation so we're still getting starvation turtles in.

Dr Gilbert said humans were impacting on turtle populations as well. "If you do have a fishing line that's snagged please don't cut it off and just let it go in the water," she said. "Unfortunately these animals are starving - they're becoming opportunistic eaters, they're eating what they can see - they don't know the difference. "It's a horrendous way to die when you open them up and see the fishing line through them, it's terrible."

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

## **Indian River Lagoon seagrass showing signs of recovery (FL, USA)**

26 November 2014, by Jim Waymer, Florida Today

Despite entering its dormant season, seagrass is showing signs of recovery in the Indian River Lagoon. The bottom plant that provides a key barometer of the lagoon's overall health is stable in the south-central Indian River Lagoon, data released this month shows. St. Johns River Water Management District surveys near Wabasso and Vero Beach found that seagrass coverage has remained stable since October. The news comes on the heels of district reports last month that lagoon seagrass had increased by 4,700 acres, or 12 percent, between 2011 and 2013.

Seagrass is the lagoon's prime nursery for fish and other marine life that helps drive \$3.7 billion in annual economic activity. Despite recent improvements, seagrass remains well below what it was just two years before a 2011 algae "superbloom." That event and subsequent algae blooms killed some 47,000 acres of lagoon seagrass, about 60 percent of the lagoon's total coverage. Hundreds of manatees, pelicans and dolphins died in the fallout from the seagrass loss.

Seagrass the district transplanted last year throughout the lagoon has shown mixed results, with natural seagrass growth outpacing the transplants. The district plans to spend about \$85,000 on the three-year transplant project. The Sebastian Inlet District — which pioneered seagrass transplant methods in the lagoon — chipped in about another \$25,000 for similar efforts near the inlet, with positive results so far. Recent data from the St. Johns district shows seagrass coverage in Volusia, Brevard and Indian River counties is still almost 40 percent less than what it was before the 2011 superbloom. Just two years before the 2011 superbloom, lagoon seagrass thrived at levels not seen since the 1940s. Restoration efforts finally seemed to be paying off, with some help from drought, which meant less polluting runoff into the waterway. Officials expect seagrass to rebound more quickly near inlets. But grass beds near cities could take much longer.

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

## **Vietnam to host first Dugong Festival on Phu Quoc Island (Vietnam)**

26 November 2014, Thanh Nien News

A festival will be held on Phu Quoc on November 30 to raise awareness about the protection of the Dugong, an endangered marine creature that lives in the waters around Vietnam's largest island. On Sunday morning, the Dugong Festival 2014 will kick off in the island's Duong Dong Town and will include a parade and dramatic contest designed to encourage participants to take part in saving the endangered mammalian marine creatures. According to WWF, Phu Quoc and Con Dao are the only two marine habitats in Vietnam and were home to no more than 100 dugongs in 2003.

The festival will be jointly-held by the NGO Wildlife At Risk (WAR), the Phu Quoc Marine Protected Area and the Phu Quoc District Department of Education and Training. About 800 people are expected to join the parade, including government officials, teachers, students, residents and tourists. The event will begin and end at the Phu Quoc Cultural House after passing through several tourism sites. The Phu Quoc Cultural House will host a dramatic contest that will include performances from six marine conservation clubs. Special songs and dances from six secondary schools will also be performed at the festival. Participants will commit to conservation by signing two dugong models.

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

## **Speared dugong swims ashore to die (Solomon Islands)**

07 November 2014, *Solomon Star*

The unexpected happened on Thursday at the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources head office when from the ocean; a dugong came ashore and died at the Ministry's ramp (seafront). The event which seemed unusual was the first of its kind to have occurred, stirring many of the Ministry's officers to stand and watch in amazement.

After careful observations, it was determined that the dugong was believed to have been speared by fishermen at sea a while ago, and had come ashore to die. The corpse was believed to have been butchered and then shared amongst those who were at the scene on Thursday.

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

## **Canegrowers warned 'alternative' chemicals a threat to reef health (Australia)**

17 November 2014, *ABC Online*

A researcher is warning new herbicides used within the Queensland sugarcane industry could be just as damaging to the environment as the ones they're replacing. The industry has been gradually reducing its reliance on a group of herbicides known as photosystem II inhibitors (PSIIs), which includes products such as diuron and atrazine. Usage restrictions were placed on some of these chemicals in the Great Barrier Reef catchment during 2009, with the industry encouraged to move towards another group of mostly non-PSII herbicides. However, James Cook University researcher Dr Aaron Davis says a desktop study of 25 'alternatives' shows many could be just as harmful as the regulated chemicals.

The research findings were published in May, but will only go before the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority for consideration later this month. In a statement, APWMA executive director Dr Raj Bhula says 'it's too early to tell what the regulatory response may be'. Dr Davis says regulation was an 'ad hoc' reaction to the reef health issue, and is cautioning against further restrictions being placed on the industry.

While the long-term implications of the findings remain unclear, the industry has thrown its support behind the research effort. Manager of Canegrowers Herbert River and Ingham, Peter Sheedy, says if additional regulations are imposed as a result of the study, growers will simply have to adapt. The Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection says that, since 2009, \$5.4 million has been invested to support graziers and cane growers develop best management programs to prevent sediments, fertilisers and pesticides entering the reef. Almost \$9 million has also been spent on research projects to give graziers and cane growers more information and tools to develop property action plans. The Department says its latest Reef Report Card (released in June) showed the decline in the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef had halted and reversed. It also says 49 per cent of Queensland sugarcane growers had adopted improved land management practices by June last year, with a 28 per cent drop in pesticides now entering the reef.

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

## **Minor dredging needed for Hastings port expansion, study finds (Vic, Australia)**

27 November 2014, *by Adam Carey, Brisbane Times*

The Naphine government's case for building Melbourne's next big container port at Hastings has been boosted by the discovery that only minor dredging of the sea floor would be required to create access for larger ships. Digging a deeper shipping channel to the Port of Hastings in Western Port Bay "would require around 9 million cubic metres of dredging", a November 13 briefing from Port of Hastings Development Authority chief Mike Lean to Ports Minister David Hodgett states. This is less than half the 22.9 million cubic metres of dredging completed in the controversial Port Phillip channel deepening project last decade.

Studies of the Western Port sea bed have found the existing channel to Hastings could be dredged to a draft depth of 14.5 metres – deep enough for a ship carrying 8000 containers – by removing just 1 million cubic metres of earth. A further 8 million cubic metres of material, mostly sand, would need to be removed to build shipping berths at the port terminal and a swing basin.

Environmental groups oppose the dredging of Western Port Bay due to the potential for environmental damage to its internationally listed mud flats, mangrove swamps and seagrass. Mr Hodgett said environmental studies were under way and would continue until 2017.

*full story:* <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/victoria/victoria-state-election-2014/minor-dredging-needed-for-hastings-port-expansion-study-finds-20141127-11ugjy.html>

## **Manatee makes rare visit to Texas waters (TX, USA)**

25 November 2014, Big News Network

Authorities in Texas said they are working on a plan to assist an unusual visitor -- the first manatee to visit the Houston area in 19 years. The Chambers County Sheriff's Office said a deputy spotted the male manatee swimming up a channel Sunday near Baytown and barriers were put in place once the sea mammal settled in a spot next to a warm water outlet. Sheriff Brian Hawthorne said waters in the area are too cold for manatees this time of year.

Experts said they were able to identify the manatee using the scar patterns on his back. They said the animal usually spends his time in Tampa, Fla., and they are not sure why he made the swim to the Houston area. Heidi Whitehead, operations coordinator at the Texas Marine Mammal Stranding Network, said her group is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Sea World San Antonio on a plan to relocate the sea cow before temperatures drop too much.

Whitehead said the manatee could be pulled from the water before the end of the day Tuesday and will be taken to Sea World if it is found to be in good health or a Marine Mammal facility in Galveston if it requires urgent care. A manatee was previously rescued from waters near Corpus Christi in 2007. The animal was returned to Florida. Ben Hooper

[full story: http://www.bignewsnetwork.com/index.php/sid/227971941](http://www.bignewsnetwork.com/index.php/sid/227971941)

## **How Did Manatees Inspire Mermaid Legends? (FL, USA)**

25 November 2014, by Lang Kanai, National Geographic

In Florida, many of the languid giants—also called sea cows—are killed each year in boating collisions. That's why November is also Manatee Awareness Month, which just this year became official in the state of Florida. Governor Rick Scott issued a proclamation to protect the state's official mammal as a "distinctive, valuable, and beloved natural resource."

The International Union for Conservation of Nature lists the American manatee—also known as the West Indian manatee—as vulnerable, with less than 10,000 individuals of that species left in the wild. The population in Florida is estimated at 4,831, according to Save the Manatee. The ocean's largest herbivore, sirenians are also notable as the creatures that have long fueled mermaid myths and legend across cultures. Christopher Columbus, in his first journey to the Americas, caught a glimpse of three "mermaids" off the prow of his ship, writing in his journal: "*On the previous day [8 Jan 1493], when the Admiral went to the Rio del Oro [Haiti], he said he quite distinctly saw three mermaids, which rose well out of the sea; but they are not so beautiful as they are said to be, for their faces had some masculine traits.*" (*Voyages of Columbus 218*)." Following Columbus's expedition to the Americas, sideshows in Europe advertised "recently discovered" mermaids from the new world, often a deceased sirenian.

Thousands of miles from the seas Columbus sailed, the dugong—found in the Pacific Ocean—had been living in legend for centuries. In 1959, 3,000 year-old cave drawings depicting dugongs—the word translates to "lady of the sea" in the Malay language—inside Malaysia's Tambun Cave were discovered. In Palau, the dugong plays a central role in traditional ceremony and lore. Stories of young women transformed into these gentle grazers endure, and wooden storyboard carvings illustrate dugongs aiding fishermen lost at sea.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature also lists the dugong as vulnerable to extinction. The animal's population across its range remains unknown, but up to 15 animals are likely killed in Palau each year for food, according to the Etpison Museum's Dugong Awareness Project. Without stronger conservation efforts, the gentle creatures that once inspired fantastic mermaid myths will themselves be consigned to mere legend.

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/11/141125-manatee-awareness-month-dugongs-animals-science/>

## **Government research paper scuppers Julie Bishop's Reef attack on Obama (Australia)**

24 November 2014, by Steve Bishop, Independent Australia

An Australian Government publication shows that senior Abbott Government Ministers Julie Bishop and Andrew Robb are totally wrong in criticising U.S. President Barack Obama for his Great Barrier Reef warning.

The Australian Government research paper found that 'reducing the amount of climate change is the single most effective way of minimising negative impacts' on the Great Barrier Reef. The paper, published in 2007, says: 'Even under the most optimistic climate change scenarios, the GBR is destined for significant change over this century; under pessimistic scenarios, catastrophic impacts are possible.'

But Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, along with Trade Minister Andrew Robb criticised President Obama for his speech at Queensland University before the G20 meeting. Ms Bishop was quoted by Fairfax media as saying of the reef: "It's not under threat from climate change because its biggest threat is nutrient runoffs from agricultural land [and] the second biggest threat is natural disasters, but this has been for 200 years."

<https://independentaustalia.net/environment/environment-display/government-research-paper-sinks-julie-bishops-reef-attack-on-obama,7121>

[www.seagrasswatch.org](http://www.seagrasswatch.org)



*Related stories*

*Newman and Bishop's bizarre reef whinge to Obama (Climate Spectator)*

<https://www.businessspectator.com.au/article/2014/11/25/policy-politics/newman-and-bishops-bizarre-reef-whinge-obama>

*Government runs unconvincing rearguard defence against Obama's Barrier Reef intervention (The Conversation)*

<http://theconversation.com/government-runs-unconvincing-rearguard-defence-against-obamas-barrier-reef-intervention-34548>

*Australian foreign minister says reef not in danger but what do her own scientists say? (the Guardian)*

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/planet-oz/2014/nov/25/australian-foreign-minister-says-reef-not-in-danger-but-what-do-her-own-scientists-disagree>

## **Andrew Robb: Obama misinformed in 'unnecessary' Great Barrier Reef speech (Australia)**

23 Nov 2014, by Shalailah Medhora, *The Guardian*

Trade minister Andrew Robb has slammed US president Barack Obama's call for Australia to do more to save the Great Barrier Reef, saying the speech was unnecessary and Obama was misinformed. Robb is the latest high-profile minister to criticise the climate change speech, which Obama made on the sidelines of last weekend's G20 meeting in Brisbane.

On Friday, foreign minister Julie Bishop publicly rebuked Obama for the address, saying that she had a briefing with the US secretary of the interior Sally Jewell before the G20 in which she'd outlined the action Australia was taking to protect the reef. The trade minister took up the fight on Sunday, saying the content of the speech was wrong. Robb said the speech unfairly highlighted the issue of climate change, which wasn't the focus of the G20 meeting.

Australia's attempts to keep climate change off the G20 agenda were hijacked by the announcement of a climate deal between the US and China in the lead up to the high-profile leaders' meeting. A final communique by the leaders included a call for all countries to contribute to the international green climate fund, a call previously rejected by Australian prime minister Tony Abbott.

*full story:* <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2014/nov/23/andrew-robb-obama-misinformed-in-unnecessary-great-barrier-reef-speech>

*Same story appeared in*

*The Age*

*The Brisbane Times*

*The Canberra Times*

*9 News*

*Sky News Australia*

*SBS World News Australia*

*The Australian*

*The Herald Sun*

*The Daily Telegraph*

*News.com.au*

*The Courier Mail*

*The Advertiser*

*Perthnow*

*The Mercury*

*NT News*

*The Geelong Advertiser*

*International Business Times*

*Related stories:*

*Obama climate speech "unnecessary", says Trade Minister (The Sydney Morning Herald)*

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/obama-climate-speech-unnecessary-says-trade-minister-20141123-11s6ci.html>

## **Julie Bishop says Barack Obama wrong about climate change threat to Great Barrier Reef (Australia)**

21 November 2014, by Latika Bourke and Peter Hannam, *the Sydney Morning Herald*

Julie Bishop has rejected Barack Obama's assertion that the Great Barrier Reef is under threat from climate change in a further sign of the Australian government's displeasure with the US President's speech that overshadowed the G20 in Brisbane. But world leading scientists have rejected Ms Bishop's claims, pointing out that rising temperatures threaten the reef with mass bleaching, while fragile ecosystems will suffer due to increasing concentrations of carbon dioxide in the oceans.

The Foreign Minister had previously gently chided the US President, saying she personally briefed the United States about potential threats to the reef just days before Mr Obama's address last Saturday, but in an exclusive interview with Fairfax Media in New York, Ms Bishop went further and directly contradicted the President. But on Friday Ms

Bishop said the Australian government was already acting to protect the reef from its greatest threats, which she stressed did not include climate change.

However, Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, director of the University of Queensland's Global Change Institute, backed the US President, saying Mr Obama was "right on the money". Charlie Veron, a former chief scientist at the Australian Institute of Marine Science, went further, saying the Abbott government was downplaying the dire future facing the Great Barrier Reef and coral reefs everywhere. Ms Bishop defended the government's efforts to protect the reef, saying it was stopping agricultural run-off, had stopped mining exploration was banning the dumping of capital dredge waste.

full story: <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/julie-bishop-says-barack-obama-wrong-about-climate-change-threat-to-great-barrier-reef-20141121-11rdtf.html>

Same article appeared in  
The Age  
The Brisbane Times  
The Canberra Times

Related stories:

Barack Obama overlooked Barrier Reef action claims Julie Bishop (ABC 7.30)

<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2014/s4133078.htm>

Julie Bishop berates Barack Obama over his G20 climate change speech (9 News)

<http://www.9news.com.au/world/2014/11/21/19/51/julie-bishop-berates-barack-obama-over-his-g20-climate-change-speech>

### **Tony Abbott running out of places to hide on environment (Australia)**

21 November 2014, the Canberra Times

Five years after declaring that the argument behind climate science was "absolute crap" – and four months after proudly repealing Labor's carbon tax – Tony Abbott this week stated that strong and binding emissions reductions targets must be set at next year's climate conference in Paris. And he warned that the world could not afford another disappointment like the Copenhagen summit in 2009. That statement, which followed a meeting with French President Francois Hollande, raised conjecture that Mr Abbott was – if not the throes of a Damascene conversion – then subtly shifting his position from leaner in chief of the developed world to willing, even enthusiastic lifter.

When Mr Abbott gave his blunt assessment of climate change, he qualified it by saying "however, the politics of this are tough for us". They have been especially tough of late. In a speech in Brisbane last week, US President Barack Obama declared that no other country had more at stake when it came to thinking about and acting on climate change than Australia. Shortly after the G20 summit ended, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper appeared to abandon his opposition to making a contribution to the United Nations' Green Climate Fund – a position shared with Mr Abbott. Mr Abbott's growing international isolation on this crucial environmental matter has not deterred his cheer squad at home, however.

Mr Abbott would now realise that there are fewer places for him (and Australia) to hide on climate change. If the support of his brother prime minister in Canada evaporates, then he will be standing side by side with Libya, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Egypt, the last remaining climate-change holdouts. Such an unappealing prospect might well explain the shift in his remarks after meeting Mr Hollande. Having made outright opposition to effective climate change measures a central pillar of his political success, Mr Abbott faces an awkward task in transitioning to a more responsible and constructive attitude.

full story: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/comment/ct-editorial/tony-abbott-running-out-of-places-to-hide-on-environment-20141121-11r7xc.html>

Same article appeared in  
The Age  
The Sydney Morning Herald  
The Brisbane Times  
WAToday

Related stories:

Australia one of only four nations forecast to miss 2020 emissions target (the Guardian)

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2014/nov/21/australia-one-of-four-nations-forecast-to-miss-2020-emissions-target>

### **Turtle! Turn and migrate to the SE Pacific! (Puerto Rico)**

20 November 2014, The Earth Times

The green turtle is often forgotten in the midst of critically-endangered species and those that live in restricted habitats. *Chelonia mydas* needs suitable areas to gather in the South Pacific as well as beaches to lay eggs. The age of individuals after they distribute themselves as neonates determines where they aggregate, according to a new study. Ximena Velez-Zuazo, Javier Quiñones and their colleagues work largely at the University of Puerto Rico-Rio

Piedras and Shaleyra Kelez ecOceánica in Perú, but it is the Peruvian coast where the turtles have been found. They publish this paper, "Fast Growing, Healthy and Resident Green Turtles -----" in PLOS ONE.

The juvenile oceanic phase of many turtle life stories lasts for years. The green turtle follows this up with this papers specific juvenile, sub-adult and adult neritic (coastal) phases that have critical requirements. Feeding in seagrass beds and even mangroves is well-known for this species, but mixed bottoms and reefs are also used, as long as food is available to colour that green body! They spend a lot of time in these neritic areas, allowing our researchers access to data here that is invaluable in countering their endangered status.

As a first for the SE Pacific, this research is absolutely invaluable. It proves that juveniles inhabit the "feeding-up" upwelling zone at Paracas. These animals were benthic in habit. El Nuro had mainly sub-adults in residence. Happily, these figures on the population provide the highest values reported in the east of the ocean. They also illustrate well that the theory of development habitats holds true. Despite a big by-catch problem, the green turtle seems relatively safe there because of the rich Humboldt Current. *Chrysaora plocamia* is the large jellyfish preyed upon here in the summer, while for some potential algal foods, *Caulerpa* sp is very common in El Nuro, despite the sparse seaweed abundance there. Fish and squid discards near a pier were also suspected as a potential food source. More studies are obviously required on precise diet, but it can't be denied that these chelonians are growing faster than others in this cooler, richer environment.

*full story: <http://www.earthtimes.org/scitech/turtle-turn-migrate-pacific/2753/>*

### **Destin awarded \$3.6 million grant (FL, USA)**

*18 November 2014, the Destin Log*

The city of Destin was notified Monday that it will receive approximately \$3.6 million in grant funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for stormwater improvements. City staff submitted the grant application this past summer with a goal to enhance, maintain and restore the ecological integrity of Choctawhatchee Bay, Joe's Bayou, Indian Bayou and Destin Harbor through the accelerated implementation of the final six projects identified in the city's 2004 Master Stormwater Management Plan.

The implementation of these projects will result in greatly improved benthic (water bottom) habitat quality, increased biological diversity and productivity, and improved water quality to assist seagrass recovery in the bay. The proposed construction will also create trash/debris collection points, remove invasive species to protect the surrounding wetlands, and provide seagrass monitoring.

This grant is part of a larger movement by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation that includes nearly \$100 million in grant funding from its Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund (Gulf Fund) to 25 projects in the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. The projects, developed in consultation with state and federal resource agencies, are designed to remedy harm and reduce the risk of future harm to natural resources that were affected by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

*full story: <http://www.thedestinlog.com/news/destin-awarded-3-6-million-grant-1.402683>*

### **Bay restoration project announced (USA)**

*17 November 2014, The News Herald*

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission will receive nearly \$2 million to restore oyster habitats in St. Andrew Bay from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). The Oyster Reef Habitat Restoration project is one of 10 Florida Gulf Restoration projects that will be paid for with \$34.3 million from the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund. The NFWF announced the projects Monday. The oyster bed restoration will improve water quality and help restore seagrass, which will benefit a variety of plant and animal species in the bay, said Jim Muller, Bay County's RESTORE Act coordinator.

The NFWF said the restoration of one and a quarter miles of oyster habitats in West Bay will improve the water quality by reducing sediments, which will improve fisheries and reduce turbidity and wave action. The project is expected to expand over 200 acres of seagrass beds. Grey snapper, spotted sea trout, mullet, grouper, red drum, flounder, shrimp, blue crab and scallops are among the species NFWF expects to benefit from the project.

Muller said the habitat was not directly affected by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, but that's not required of projects that receive the grants. The Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund was established in 2013 with money paid by BP and Transocean to settle criminal charges stemming from the spill.

*Full story: <http://www.newsherald.com/news/government/bay-restoration-project-announced-1.402467>*

## **Queensland premier tells Obama he is 'solid' on protecting Great Barrier Reef (Australia)**

16 November 2014, *The Guardian*

The Queensland premier has moved to reassure US president Barack Obama that his government is “solid” on protecting the Great Barrier Reef. Campbell Newman criticised a “campaign of misinformation” by green groups for sending out the wrong message on the reef to international visitors.

In his speech on Saturday Obama warned that natural wonders such as the reef were under threat from climate change, and he wanted it to still be there in 50 years' time, saying “I want to come back [to visit it], and I want my daughters to be able to come back, and I want them to be able to bring their daughters or sons to visit.” On Sunday, Newman moved to reassure the US leader.

But conservationists said mining and industrialisation on Queensland's northern coast was an enduring threat. Unesco has given Australia until February to show it is properly managing the reef. If it is not satisfied with the response, the reef could be listed as a World Heritage site in danger.

Full story: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/16/queensland-premier-tells-obama-he-is-solid-on-protecting-great-barrier-reef>

## **Obama pledges \$US3bn for climate fund (Australia)**

16 November 2014, *Courier Mail*

The United States will pump \$US3 billion into a global climate fund, stepping up pressure on other nations such as Australia to follow suit. US President Barack Obama used a speech on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Brisbane to make the announcement to contribute to the "global fight against climate change".

The United Nations Green Climate Fund, was set up to support developing nations dealing with the impacts of climate change, such as rising seas, higher temperatures and extreme weather. The US contribution is the biggest country pledge so far. The UN will now have about \$US6 billion of the \$US10 billion it hopes to raise.

Mr Obama used Australia as an example of what could happen if climate change wasn't addressed, by pointing to risk to Great Barrier Reef and the prospect of longer droughts. Mr Obama said the plan to cut carbon pollution in the US and reverse the course of China's emissions was aimed at paving the way for a more ambitious deal in Paris next year when global leaders again meet.

Full story: <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/breaking-news/obama-pledges-us3bln-for-climate-fund/story-fnihsfrf-1227124058029>

## **Great Barrier Reef dangers: Unesco says Australia is listening at last (Australia)**

14 November 2014, *The Guardian*

The head of Unesco says the Australian government has started to listen to international concerns over the health of the Great Barrier Reef, raising hopes that it will avoid receiving an embarrassing “in danger” listing next year. The director general of the UN's cultural and heritage body, Irina Bokova, told Guardian Australia she hoped the government's plan for the reef would “reverse the trend” of its decline. Bokova said Unesco's world heritage committee was “very worried by the damage to the universal value of the Great Barrier Reef but now the government is listening, the government is starting to take serious measures”.

Unesco experts are assessing Australia's plan to deal with the decline of the Great Barrier Reef, which has lost half its coral cover in the past 30 years. The Australian Academy of Science has cast doubt on whether the government's plan will restore the reef. The Unesco chief also welcomed the announcement by the environment minister, Greg Hunt, that dumping dredged sediment into the reef's marine park will be banned. A recent assessment by the Great Barrier Reef marine park authority cited climate change as the leading threat to the coral ecosystem, with pollution, extreme weather events and a plague of coral-eating starfish also contributing to its malaise.

Full story: <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/nov/14/great-barrier-reef-dangers-unesco-says-australia-is-listening-at-last>

## **Can't dump on Great Barrier Reef but you can next door (Australia)**

13 November 2014, *New Scientist*

Australia has announced it will not allow the dumping of dredged up material inside the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. But it has not put limits on dredging itself inside the park, or dumping inside the larger World Heritage Area, where most of it occurs anyway, and from where the plumes of dredging spoil can drift onto the reef and choke life.

There are plans to expand five ports inside the marine park, and these are likely to involve dredging. The first and most controversial one has been at Abbot Point, for which the government recently overturned plans to dump in the Marine Park, and decided to dump on land instead. But with four other potential port expansions, the issue has remained hotly debated.



Conservation organisation WWF hailed the move as an important step forward, but noted that in some ways it is a small change from current practice. But Selina Ward from the University of Queensland in Brisbane says the announcement is a distraction. Ward also notes that dumping dredging spoil on land is not always a solution either. After announcing it will not dump dredge from the Abbot Point expansion onto the reef, the government announced it would try to fast-track plans to dump the millions of tonnes of sludge on the Caley wetlands.

Full story: <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn26550-cant-dump-on-great-barrier-reef-but-you-can-next-door.html>

### **Great Barrier Reef: Greg Hunt vows to ban sediment dumping in marine park (Australia)**

13 November 2014, *The Guardian*

The government has pledged to formally ban the highly controversial practice of dumping sediment in the waters of the Great Barrier Reef. Greg Hunt, the environment minister, said he will use the existing Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority act to “put in place this ban in legislative form”. The ban will apply to all new dredging projects that plan to dispose of removed seabed into the reef’s marine park.

The ban differs slightly from Labor’s stated policy, announced this week, that there should be a legislated ban on dumping spoil in the reef’s world heritage area, rather than just the marine park. While the two areas overlap almost entirely, the world heritage area contains inshore waters where ports are located. Hunt initially approved a plan to dump dredged spoil within the marine park in order to allow the expansion of the Abbot Point port in Queensland. However, an alternative plan has now been put forward by the Queensland government to place the spoil on land, with Hunt promising a “line in the sand” on stopping future dumping.

WWF welcomed Hunt’s move while calling for the entire world heritage area to be protected from dumping. The Greens said while Hunt’s move is welcome, there are “loopholes” that will allow dredging and dumping that has already been planned.

Full story: <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/nov/13/great-barrier-reef-greg-hunt--ban-sediment-dumping-marine-park>

### **\$700k allocated to clean up marine litter along reef (Australia)**

13 November 2014, *Gladstone Observer*

The Federal Government will allocate \$700,000 to clean up marine debris across the Great Barrier Reef. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority will team with community groups along the Queensland coast to conduct reef clean-up events. The first annual clean-up will be held in October next year.

Waterways, beaches and the reef catchment will be cleared of litter to prevent wet season rains washing it in to the ocean. Reef Guardian councils, fishers, farmers and schools, along with traditional owners, community groups and tourism operators, will be able to get involved in the clean-ups and organise their own activities. Environment Minister Greg Hunt said the reef was a great natural treasure, and it was important to keep it free of litter.

Identifying marine debris hotspots through the development of a smartphone app is part of the new initiative, being delivered under the \$5 million Dugong and Turtle Protection Plan.

Full story: <http://www.gladstoneobserver.com.au/news/700k-allocated-clean-marine-litter-along-reef/2451906/>

### **Labor to ban dumping dredge spoil on reef (Australia)**

10 November 2014, *The Daily Telegraph*

Dumping dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area would be banned under Labor. Queensland Opposition Leader Anastacia Palaszczuk says, if elected, state and federal Labor will immediately end dumping and she insists it won’t interfere with proposed port expansions along the state’s coast. Ms Palaszczuk claims that under the state Liberal National Party government up to 10 million cubic metres of spoil could be dumped in the World Heritage Area.

In December, federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt approved a controversial plan to dump three million cubic metres of dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park as a part an Abbot Point coal port expansion project. He’s now considering a new plan to dump the spoil onshore - an idea put forward by Queensland’s government after public outcry against the offshore dumping proposal.

UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee has raised a number of concerns about the health of the reef, including the potential impact of dredging. The federal and state governments have been implementing recommendations made by the World Heritage Committee, which will next year decide whether Australia has done enough to stop the reef being listed as a World Heritage Site in danger.

Full story: <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/business/breaking-news/labor-to-ban-dumping-dredge-spoil-on-reef/story-fnn9c0gv-1227118281914?nk=e825a1aa68a34a4ec05ae858f1a44dd5>

## **Somebody call Specsavers: dugong mistaken for croc (Australia)**

10 November 2014, Fraser Coast Chronicle

People enjoying Sunday at The Bayswater Hotel in Hervey Bay got a shock when they thought they spotted a crocodile at the beach across the road. Hervey Bay Surf Life Saving came to the rescue, going out on the water to further investigate. It was revealed the animal was in fact a dugong, who sources say regularly visited that patch of the Esplanade.

Full story: <http://www.frasercoastchronicle.com.au/news/someone-call-specsavers/2447214/>

## **Eelgrass could save the planet (USA)**

09 November 2014, Boston Globe

Standing in a cove off Massachusetts's North Shore, Juliet Simpson holds a tube filled with some of the most precious mud in the world, mud that could have significant impact in the fight against climate change. But first, that mud needs to revolutionize how we think of seagrass. Simpson, a coastal ecologist at MIT's Sea Grant program, is on the search for carbon, and in this particular mud sample, which came from a seagrass bed about eight feet below the water's surface in Nahant Harbor, chances are she'll find quite a bit.

Two years ago, in a first-ever global assessment, scientists calculated that the soils in seagrass meadows — despite being less than 0.2 percent of the world's oceans — captured at least 10 percent of the ocean's carbon. Since then the estimate has increased. Fred Short, a University of New Hampshire marine ecologist, puts the latest range between 12 and 20 percent. When combined with marshes and tropical mangroves, seagrasses are part of ecosystems comprising only 2 percent of ocean area — but accounting for a whopping 50 percent of ocean carbon storage. Those discoveries are quickly elevating the concept of "blue carbon" among scientists and rapidly suggesting that these marine forests are as critical to controlling climate change as the emerald green Amazonian jungles and North American boreal expanses.

For some perspective, known terrestrial forests take up at least 40 times more area than seagrasses, marshes, and mangroves. Yet the carbon storage capability of just 1 acre of seagrass is equal to 40 acres of terrestrial forest, Australian researcher Peter Ralph said in an interview last year with Voice of America. Marine plants, at the most minimal estimates, can bury carbon at a rate at least half that of all land forests combined. More optimistic estimates suggest their total ability at least equals and probably surpasses that of forests.

full story: <http://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2014/11/09/eelgrass-could-save-planet/LzMeONuQ6Y5J5G55jXuS5N/story.html>

## **South Fork Natural History Museum Hosting 3rd Annual Save Our Seagrass Celebration Benefiting Marine Meadows (NY, USA)**

01 November 2014, by Nicole Barylski, Hamptons.com

South Fork Natural History Museum is holding the 3rd Annual Save Our Seagrass Celebration benefiting Marine Meadows, an initiative of the Cornell Cooperative Extension Marine Program, from 5 to 8 p.m. on Saturday, November 8, 2014.

The Marine Meadows Program is the latest addition to Cornell Cooperative Extension's Eelgrass Program, which gives the community an opportunity to learn about the biology and importance of eelgrass during unique, hands-on restoration efforts. In recent decades, local populations of seagrass have been on the decline. The underwater plant species provides a vital nursery ground and habitat to several aquatic animals. Marine Meadows is fighting the decrease through their eelgrass restoration work and as a result of Save Our Seagrass, 10,000 shoots of eelgrass will be planted in East End bays. Prior to the event, the community is encouraged to take part in the free Marine Meadows workshop at South Fork

full story: <http://www.hamptons.com/Out-And-About/For-The-Cause/20222/South-Fork-Natural-History-Museum-Hosting-3rd.html>

## **Court adjourns dredge spoil dispute (Australia)**

01 November 2014, Rockhampton Morning Bulletin

The Mackay Conservation Group has had a minor win in court in its challenge opposing the controversial Abbot Point coal terminal expansion. The group has taken Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt to court over the government's decision to allow dredge spoil from the project to be dumped offshore near the Great Barrier Reef. Further to the Federal Government decision, last month the Queensland Government unveiled a plan to dump dredge spoil from the project onshore.

North Queensland Bulk Ports, GVK Hancock and Adani Group have approval to dump three million cubic metres of dredge spoil in the marine park's boundary under the initial Federal Government plan. Dredging is set to start in March next year. However, Mr Hunt needs to approve the Queensland plan before it is given the green light. Mr Hunt's department this week released a document saying the Queensland Government proposal would be assessed on preliminary documentation rather than a separate Environmental Impact Statement.

Mackay Conservation Group co-ordinator Ellen Roberts said on Friday the Brisbane Federal Court had decided to adjourn the group's matter to a date to be fixed. She said the offshore court case had been put on hold until the onshore issue had been dealt with.

full story: <http://www.themorningbulletin.com.au/news/court-adjourns-abbot-point-expansion-dispute/2439213/>

## GALLERY

### Sanya, China, 11th International Seagrass Biology Workshop: 07 - 10 November 2014

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

### Noosa, Qld (Australia): 06 November 2014

## CONFERENCES

### **Coastal & Estuarine Research Federation 23rd Biennial Conference (CERF2015) (Portland, Oregon, USA, 8-12 November 2015)**

Theme: Grand Challenges in Estuarine and Coastal Science: Securing our Future

The CERF 2015 scientific program offers four days of timely, exciting and diverse information on a vast array of estuarine and coastal subjects. Presentations will examine new findings within CERF's traditional scientific, education and management disciplines and encourage interaction among coastal and estuarine scientists and managers. Additionally, the Scientific Program Committee plans to convene special sessions and workshops that promote intellectually stimulating discussions of the Grand Challenges in Coastal and Estuarine Science:

Managing and mitigating the risks of climate change – *shifts in precipitation and hydrologic patterns; wetland and species migrations; sea level rise; drought and water scarcity; severe storms, etc.*

Synergistic effects of ocean acidification with hypoxia, eutrophication or other conditions – *synthesis of information (e.g., from 2013 CERF) with new research results and methods for mitigating effects*

Polar estuaries and coasts – *physical oceanography, ice cover, biogeochemical interactions and impacts to coastal ecosystems*

Making data work – *advancement, management and integration of modern datasets (observing, genomics, bioinformatics) and capabilities to yield predictive models and tools*

Cities by the sea – *scientific exploration of dense and growing populations, economies and the built environment on coastal ecosystems; success stories from green infrastructure*

Estuaries under threat – *environmental change and variability associated with population growth, resource acquisition and scarcity, war/conflict, biodiversity loss and interactions in the next 50 years*

Multiple uses – *managing multiple, conflicting uses of coastal resources across the natural and sociological continuum; integration, quantification and valuation of ecosystem goods and services*

The Scientific Program Committee for CERF's 23rd Biennial Conference is now accepting proposals for scientific sessions and workshops. Ideas for topics and speakers will be accepted through 12 September 2014. Proposals will only be accepted online. A formal Call for Scientific Sessions and Workshop Proposals is now posted on the CERF website. Some examples include:

- managing and mitigating the risks of climate change;
- synergistic effects of ocean acidification with hypoxia, eutrophication or other conditions;
- polar estuaries and coasts;
- making data work;
- cities by the sea;
- estuaries under threat; and
- multiple uses of coastal resources.

CERF 2015 sessions will include oral, poster and combined oral/poster formats. Those making submissions should be prepared to either act as a convener or chair of the session/workshop they are proposing, or identify an appropriate chair.

for more information, visit <http://www.erf.org/cerf2015>

## 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 35,236 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>

**Virtual Herbarium** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/herbarium.html>

**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.