



# Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

**30 November 2015**

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## IN THIS BULLETIN

NEWS .....	1
Rare dugong sighting in southern NSW (NSW, Australia) .....	1
Estuary closed to avoid a stink (VIC, Australia).....	2
Protection of our marine life needs more than Marine Protected Areas, we need to make it resilient (UK).....	2
Elusive Dugong: Icon in fight over U.S. military in Japan (Japan).....	3
Town looks to develop, embrace seagrass management plan (NY, USA).....	3
Dugong washed ashore (India) .....	3
Minimalist cork-like stools are made from landfill-diverted seagrass (Germany) .....	4
Okinawa Delegation Seeks Support for Stopping US Military (Japan).....	4
Project to save Dugong from extinction (India) .....	4
\$65,000 grant aims to improve Westport waterway (CT, USA).....	5
Teachers join scientists to study marine grass and make an unexpected find (QLD, Australia).....	5
Solicitor says environment minister must consider Adani mine's climate change impacts on the Great Barrier Reef (Australia).....	5
Australian green group to challenge India-backed coal mine it claims will destroy Great Barrier Reef (Australia) .....	5
Sea turtle found dead in crab pot on beach (QLD, Australia).....	6
Body of Dismembered Dugong Found Floating Off Phuket (Thailand) .....	6
Water quality is the focus of a St. Pete ballot question (USA).....	6
Group says mining project threatens biodiversity in Southern Mindanao, neighboring regions (Philippines) .....	7
Citizen science project offers unique volunteering opportunities with vital Seagrass habitats (UK).....	7
Sri Lanka holds workshop on Dugong and Seagrass Conservation (Sri Lanka).....	7
Teh calls for protection of seagrass heritage area (Malaysia).....	8
Dugong saviours hailed (Bahrain) .....	8
The battle to protect Wakatobi, Indonesia's world-renowned diving destination (Indonesia) .....	8
CONFERENCES .....	9
The 13th International Coral Reef Symposium (ICRS) (Hawaii, 19-24 June 2016).....	9
The 12th International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW12) (Wales, 17-23 October 2016) .....	9
GALLERY .....	10
SEAGRASS-WATCH on YouTube .....	10
...seagrass matters blog.....	10
World Seagrass Association blog <a href="http://wsa.seagrassonline.org/blog/">http://wsa.seagrassonline.org/blog/</a> .....	10
FROM HQ.....	10
Past E-bulletins .....	10
Frequently Asked Questions .....	10
Seagrass-Watch Magazine .....	10
Virtual Herbarium .....	10
Future sampling dates.....	10
Handy Seagrass Links .....	10

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

## NEWS

### **Rare dugong sighting in southern NSW (NSW, Australia)**

25 November 2015, Australian Geographic

A dugong has been spotted well outside its usual range in the waters of Merimbula in southern New South Wales – much to the surprise and delight of locals. The dugong was initially spotted by local resident Beth Richards on 18

November in Merimbula Lake, a coastal lagoon about 460km south of Sydney. Locals and tourists have made several further sightings over the past week. The core habitat for dugongs in Australia is in the tropics and subtropics, from Shark Bay in Western Australia around to Moreton Bay in Queensland. However, while sightings of dugongs this far outside of their usual range is rare, it isn't unheard of, says Amanda Hodgson, an expert in dugong behaviour at Murdoch University in WA.

Amanda added that while we do not yet know why individual dugongs occasionally head so far south, "we do know they headed a long way to get there and may travel a long way back, so it's great to hear people are respecting this animal and not causing it distress or interrupting its feeding," she said. Anthony Daly, the manager at Merimbula Aquarium, told Merimbula News Weekly – where the sighting was originally reported – that it was the first time he had heard of a dugong being sighted in the area in 25 years.

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

related article:

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/south-coast-dugong-sighting-goes-international-20151126-gl8ksx.html>

### **Estuary closed to avoid a stink (VIC, Australia)**

24 November 2015, Mornington Peninsula News

Sulphur dioxide is described as being the by-product of an "environmental tragedy" occurring along Western Port beaches, especially at Balnarring and Somers'. Merricks Creek and Estuary Working Group members have discussed solutions to the stink and agreed to the estuary being temporarily closed. The group was formed to provide community input into an independent study to investigate whether there is a practicable option to controlling the pong.

Melbourne Water's Georgina Downey has told the group that the objective is to find a permanent solution to the problem. "[Consultants] Alluvium was appointed by Melbourne Water to undertake an independent study into the reasons for the odour and to come up with possible solutions. "The main finding was that the persistent odour experienced at the estuary is due to hydrogen sulphide or 'rotten egg' gas caused by the breakdown of the large amount of seagrass which has accumulated in the estuary. "They found that because the estuary is permanently open, seagrass on the beach is carried up the estuary and deposited there. "The working group agreed that the estuary be temporarily closed to mimic the natural closing of the estuary and prevent any more seagrass entering the estuary prior to the completion of a longer term solution by the end of autumn next year."

A sand groyne will be used to close the estuary, but the estuary will be reopened "if necessary". Triggers for reopening the estuary include higher than normal levels of "rotten egg" gas, poor water quality, if high water levels threaten local flooding, and if the smell of decomposing seagrass "becomes unbearable".

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

### **Protection of our marine life needs more than Marine Protected Areas, we need to make it resilient (UK)**

23 November 2015, Swansea University

Management of the world's marine habitats needs to look beyond only Marine Protected Areas and put achieving ecosystem resilience at the top of the agenda, according to research by an international group of scientists led by Dr Richard Unsworth at Swansea University.

Management of our coasts typically takes the approach of establishing Marine Protected Areas, controlling fishing, or regulating industrial activity. But in the face of the increasing threat of climate change we need to take measures that increase the resilience of our oceans and coasts to ensure they survive into the future (*Ecological resilience is "the capacity of an ecosystem to absorb repeated disturbances or shocks and adapt to change without fundamentally switching to an alternative stable state"*). The research published online this week in Marine Pollution Bulletin examined the ecosystem resilience of seagrass meadows globally. The work shows how the resilience of these productive ecosystems is becoming compromised by a range of local to global disturbances and stressors, resulting in ecological regime shifts that undermine their long-term viability.

The paper examines over 150 sources in the academic literature and illustrates how the management of these systems needs to consider a series of features and modifiers that act as interacting influences on the resilience of the ecosystem. The paper concludes by providing a series of simple actions that marine conservation managers can take to improve ecosystem resilience.

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

## **Elusive Dugong: Icon in fight over U.S. military in Japan (Japan)**

22 November 2015, McClatchy Washington Bureau

A childlike smile overcomes Takuma Higashionna when he remembers swimming with a rare and wild dugong. That day, eight years ago, was the last time the local politician saw up close one of the endangered marine mammals, which have come to symbolize the international campaign to block an expansion of an American military base here. For nearly 20 years, activists like Higashionna have used a fear of the dugong's extinction in Japan to rally support for their cause. They've filed lawsuits delaying construction of military runways in Oura Bay on Japan's southern island of Okinawa and attracted throngs of protesters to the gates of a Marine base called Camp Schwab. But today, it's an open secret that the gentle animals already may be gone from the island. If any remain, they likely will not recover to the healthy numbers that lived here before the 1930s. Instead, dugongs on Okinawa are powerful environmental icons for a broad movement that's determined to prevent the Japanese government from filling a corner of the bay for a Marine air base that they say would disrupt a gorgeous harbor with abundant sea life.

Higashionna has been a part of two lawsuits in U.S. federal court that sought to undo the plans for Camp Schwab by calling on a Japanese law that protects dugong as a significant cultural resource. The first legal effort compelled Japan and the Marines to reassess the proposal's potential impacts on dugongs in 2008. A more recent lawsuit this year failed to persuade a Northern California judge to stop the project, though its supporters have signaled that they intend to appeal the decision.

Dugongs are special creatures in Okinawan folklore, featuring in a local creation myth. Centuries ago, Okinawans considered dugong meat to be a delicacy. Other tales credit the animals with warning people about approaching tsunamis. Dugongs were believed to be plentiful on Okinawa before World War II, but hunting and accidental catches took a toll that crushed their population. In many ways, they weren't appreciated until Washington and Tokyo proposed building runways in 1996 that threatened to damage some of their remaining habitat.

In 1997, the Mammalogical Society of Japan estimated there were fewer than 50 dugong remaining on Okinawa. More recent surveys by the Japanese government have shown traces of dugong feeding and images of a handful of creatures in and near Oura Bay as recently as 2013, according to a Marine summary of environmental reports. Those low numbers factored into an April 2014 Navy decision to proceed with the construction proposal. It noted that the planned runways at Oura Bay could not harm dugongs because of the "extremely low probability" that they're in the construction area. Ellen Hines, a geography professor at San Francisco State University, has seen evidence that dugong have been on the island in recent years, and opposes the Marine construction plan, which would eat up more than a third of the sea grass where dugong have fed in Oura Bay and drive the creatures away.

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

## **Town looks to develop, embrace seagrass management plan (NY, USA)**

21 November 2015, SoutholdLOCAL (USA)

On Tuesday, Soren Dahl of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Bureau of Marine Resources came before the Southold Town board to discuss seagrass management. According to Dahl, seagrass management across the state's waters is required; habitat experts have recommended that the a collaboration with local stakeholders be sought.

When dealing with seagrass, or eelgrass, water clarity is a primary issue, Dahl said. In past years, the losses in eelgrass have been "huge," he said, reaching historical levels. In 2014, a study of the Peconic Estuary indicated that 30 to 40 percent of its coastal habitat had been lost since 1930. That's why, he said, the aim was to reach out and partner with local municipalities, identifying areas where eelgrass still exists, and then working with local officials and stakeholders to determine a management plan, focusing on what's practical for each individual area.

While the board said there's not much seagrass left to manage in many places, Dahl said the goal was to focus on areas where it still exists, and to develop the management plan. The board suggested he work with the shellfish advisory committee and the town trustees moving forward to develop the plan. Justice Louisa Evans suggested he also speak to the Fishers Island Conservancy and harbor committee. Southold Town Supervisor Scott Russell said the seagrass proposal is a "great idea. We all support it in any way we can and look forward to working with Mr. Dahl."

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

## **Dugong washed ashore (India)**

21 November 2015, The Hindu

The carcass of a five to six-year-old female dugong was found washed ashore off Gandhi Nagar seashore near Thirupalaikudi on Friday. On being alerted by the local people, a team of forest personnel examined the carcass and buried it on the shore after a veterinary surgeon conducted the post mortem on the spot.

"It's a full grown adult and measured about 2.5 metres long with circumference measuring 1.4 metres," Deepak S Belgi, Wildlife Warden, Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park, said. Forest personnel said the decomposed carcass weighed around 400 kg and the animal could have died about two days ago. It had some external injuries, possibly suffered while being washed ashore.

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### **Minimalist cork-like stools are made from landfill-diverted seagrass (Germany)**

18 November 2015, Treehugger

Disposability is currently (and unfortunately) the foundation of our culture. From planned obsolescence, to unnecessary packaging and single-use coffee pods, disposability has been designed into so many everyday things. That's why it's imperative that designers and other creative souls get out of this 'wasteful' way of thinking, and to see 'waste' not as waste, but as a potential material. When she found out that tons of seagrass were ending up in landfills each year, German designer Carolin Pertsch decided to find new ways to use this natural material.

According to Dezeen, beaches on the German coast are cleaned up regularly of seagrass to prepare them for tourist season. Thousands of tons of these plants end up as "special waste" in landfills. To divert this perfectly usable material from the landfill, Pertsch began to collect *Zostera marina* seagrass (also known as wrack) from the coast, and found a new way to use them: as minimalist but sturdy stools.

To do this, Pertsch cleaned and sorted the grasses according to varying shades of colour, then shredded them before combining them with a bio-resin made from vegetable oil in moulds. The result is an eco-friendly bio-plastic that can be used as the stool's one-centimetre thick seat. She describes how the experiments went: "Everything started in the kitchen in our co-working space. Instead of cooking lunch, I put together natural ingredients, like starch, water and vinegar, for producing my own bioplastic, which I could use as a kind of glue." The idea was to create an everyday, innocuous stool, coming in three colours, that would enlighten people about the possibility of using "waste" material. The stools are simple, but they do highlight how materials might not be 'waste', but can be transformed into something useful and surprisingly attractive.

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### **Okinawa Delegation Seeks Support for Stopping US Military (Japan)**

18 November 2015, Center for Biological Diversity (press release)

A delegation of 27 political and community leaders from Okinawa, Japan is visiting the United States to seek support for its efforts to stop the U.S. military from building a large new base in biologically rich and sensitive Henoko and Oura Bay, home to the dugong and other endangered species. That project is strongly opposed by residents of the island, which has had a tremendous U.S. military presence since the end of World War II, and Okinawan Gov. Takeshi Onaga, who last month withdrew local consent for the project.

The Bay Area portion of the delegation's visit on Nov. 15-18 includes meetings with representatives of U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein and U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee, receptions at the city halls in San Francisco and Berkeley, a press conference at San Francisco's War Memorial Building, and meetings with the Center for Biological Diversity and other conservation groups that are challenging the project in U.S. federal court. That case is now before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, with oral arguments expected in spring 2016.

During a meeting at the Center's Oakland office, delegation members said that American and international popular support is crucial to stopping a project that is being pushed by the U.S. Department of Defense and the national government in Japan. The Okinawa delegation travels next to Washington, D.C., where it will meet with the Marine Mammal Commission, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and other groups before leaving the country on Nov. 21.

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

### **Project to save Dugong from extinction (India)**

15 November 2015, Business Standard

Government would soon take up a project to prevent the extinction of Dugong, an endangered marine mammal species, an official today said. A sum of Rs 40 lakh had been allocated for the project to protect the Dugong, Deepak S. Belgi, Wildlife Warden of Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park, said.

As part of the project, awareness would be created among fishermen on the need to protect dugong. Steps would be taken to increase the population of Dugong as it breeds round the year. Dugong is poached for its tasty flesh and medicinal properties. Its hide also is in great demand.

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

## **\$65,000 grant aims to improve Westport waterway (CT, USA)**

15 November 2015, Westport News

A Nature Conservancy-led initiative to help address the problem of excess nitrogen in Long Island Sound is the beneficiary of a Long Island Sound Futures Fund award from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The \$65,000 grant award will support community-based planning for improved water quality in the Saugatuck River Estuary — where the river meets Long Island Sound — in Westport.

The Saugatuck River Estuary work stems from a recent conservancy study of eight coastal sub-watersheds in Long Island Sound that showed nitrogen pollution from fertilizers and wastewater in Saugatuck Estuary significantly exceeds the threshold for seagrass survival. Excess nitrogen fuels the growth of harmful algae that choke seagrass meadows, destroy salt marshes and deplete oxygen in the water, killing fish and other marine life.

The largest contribution in Saugatuck comes from onsite septic systems, underscoring the need to find new solutions. The Saugatuck award will be used to evaluate and compare the feasibility, cost and effectiveness of traditional and non-traditional nitrogen reduction techniques, and develop a set of options for the fastest, least expensive approaches to improve water quality and support recovery of seagrass, saltmarshes and marine life.

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

## **Teachers join scientists to study marine grass and make an unexpected find (QLD, Australia)**

14 November 2015, Courier Mail

Six Victorian school teachers have teamed up with a group of scientists to study the impact of Brisbane's coastal development on Moreton Bay's seagrass. The six-day sailing trip was a joint initiative between Healthy Waterways Monitoring Program, Earthwatch's Teachlive Sailing for Seagrass and the Geography Teachers Association of Victoria.

Healthy Waterways chief scientist James Udy said seagrass in the area was vital for the survival of marine creatures such as green sea turtles and dugongs and supported all recreational and commercial fishing. Williamsdown High School marine biology teacher Garrett Drago said living the life of a marine biologist for the trip was an "eye-opener" and said the most important thing he learnt was why the survey was being done. 500,000 tonnes of sediment washes into southeast Queensland's waterways each year, impacting on seagrass supplies in the bay.

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

## **Solicitor says environment minister must consider Adani mine's climate change impacts on the Great Barrier Reef (Australia)**

10 November 2015, ABC Local

The chief solicitor in a new legal challenge against Australia's biggest coal project says Environment Minister Greg Hunt is obligated to consider the mine's impact on the Great Barrier Reef through its contribution to climate change. The Australian Conservation foundation lodged papers in the Federal Court yesterday against Mr Hunt's approval of the Carmichael Mine in central Queensland.

Environmental Defenders Office principal solicitor Sean Ryan said Section 137 of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act required the minister to take into consideration how coal exported from the mine would affect the reef, when burned in power stations overseas. Mr Ryan acknowledged climate change is not specifically identified in the Act, but said the wording of the Act still showed climate change should be considered.

The challenge by Australian Conservation Foundation is the latest legal challenge hurdle for the \$16 billion project by Indian company Adani, which would create the biggest coal mine in Australia. The minister's approval was challenged earlier this year by Mackay Conservation Group, also represented by the Environmental Defenders Office. That challenge resulted in the Federal Government withdrawing its approval in August to consider further advice on an endangered snake and skink. Mr Hunt reapproved the project in October, based on revised documentation.

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

## **Australian green group to challenge India-backed coal mine it claims will destroy Great Barrier Reef (Australia)**

09 November 2015, Firstpost

An Australian environmental group Monday launched a new legal challenge to a huge, India-backed coal mine, saying the government's recent re-approval of the project failed to consider the impact on the Great Barrier Reef. The Aus \$16.5 billion (US\$11.6 billion) project in the Galilee Basin in Queensland state has been criticised by environmentalists who say the coal it produces will not only contribute to global warming but will have to be shipped from a port near the World Heritage-listed reef. The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) said it had lodged

papers with the Federal Court applying to challenge Environment Minister Greg Hunt's approval of the Adani company's Carmichael coal mine.

Adani has previously accused environmental activists of exploiting legal loopholes to stall the massive open-cut and underground coal mine forecast to produce 60 million tonnes of thermal coal a year for export, with the approvals process so far stretching to five years. The Carmichael mine was blocked by the Federal Court in August over a legal challenge relating to two vulnerable reptiles -- the lizard-like yakka skink and the ornamental snake -- but was reapproved last month, with Hunt defending its strict environmental conditions.

Lawyers for the ACF said they were now seeking an independent judicial review by the Federal Court of the legality of the government's re-approval.

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

### **Sea turtle found dead in crab pot on beach (QLD, Australia)**

*09 November 2015, Mackay Daily Mercury*

A sea turtle has been found washed up on Shoal Point Beach after it became stuck in a crab pot. Lee Kyrtep shared photos and a message on social media at the weekend. The post received more than 140 likes, with Breeze Taylor commenting that "six out of seven threatened marine turtle species are found in Australian waters".

Department of Environment and Heritage Protection record all dugong and turtle deaths and strandings, with two turtles recorded as 'stranded' in the Mackay region in the first quarter of 2015. No figures for the remainder of the year are available, but the department states the marine creatures are still feeling the effects of major flooding.

"With seagrass being a major food source for green turtles and dugong, they are currently struggling to find adequate food and are suffering from malnutrition. "Turtles and dugong in poor health are also less able to fight diseases, strong ocean currents and to escape entanglement in fishing gear."

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

### **Body of Dismembered Dugong Found Floating Off Phuket (Thailand)**

*04 November 2015, Phuketwan*

The body of a headless dugong was found floating off Phuket yesterday. Marine biologists fear the harmless creature may have been dismembered so its teeth could be used in amulets. The body of the male dugong, more than 40 years old and weighing as much as 350 kilos before its head was removed, was found floating between Ko Yao Yai and Ko Yao Noi islands.

A team at the centre on Phuket's east coast was examining the dugong's remains today. Their conclusion is that marks on the body indicated the animal may have been pulled on board a trawler or some other boat where it was probably beheaded.

Seagrass beds that are the dugongs' food have been polluted by coastal resort construction and the animals have been put at risk by an increasing number of tourist boats and their propellers. The animal found floating yesterday was probably two metres long and aged at least 40, Dr Kongkiat said. The skeleton of the creature is likely to be kept for future education.

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*related articles:*

*<http://news.thaivisa.com/phuket/phuket-sea-cow-decapitated-for-teeth/119898/>*

### **Water quality is the focus of a St. Pete ballot question (USA)**

*03 November 2015, Creative Loafing Tampa*

Tampa Bay's warm, shallow waters have for years been murky with pollution from dredging, industrial emissions and wastewater — this past summer's sewage dump being a case-in-point, though ongoing efforts to improve water quality in the region have had some success. An effort up for vote on the city ballot today could enhance those with increased protections to seagrass beds.

Referendum question No.1 asks residents to decide if the City Council should be allowed to establish permanent development restrictions over underwater areas the city controls near North Shore Park. The restrictions would prevent any development or construction projects near or on the area's seagrass beds. These protections are intended to support and enhance seagrass beds that can be used to improve the city's water quality and surrounding ecology. Currently, any decisions regarding the placement of protections on seagrass beds must be approved through a referendum. Christian Haas, a member of the Old Southeast Neighborhood Association, said if the referendum passes, the City Council will no longer have to wait annually for each election to add future protections for seagrass beds.

Researchers are noticing a correlation between seagrass bed populations and water quality. According to Haas, seagrass beds filter out toxins in the water, curb erosion and aid in filtration. The Bay's water clarity also allows for sunlight to reach seagrass beds rooted deep below the surface. Groups like the Tampa Bay Estuary Program and The Nitrogen Management Consortium are already working to increase the number of seagrass beds in the Bay. According to Nanette Holland O'Hara, the Public Outreach Coordinator for the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, the amount of seagrass beds grew from 20,000 acres in 1990 to 40,295 acres this year. The number exceeds the 38,000 acres of seagrass that existed in the 1950s.

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

### **Group says mining project threatens biodiversity in Southern Mindanao, neighboring regions (Philippines)**

*03 November 2015, Minda News*

The King-king Copper-Gold Project will affect 12 "vulnerable or critically endangered" species of the 253 native or endemic plant species present in the area, as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List and the Philippine National Red List, the Francis S. Morales Resource Center said in a press statement Monday. FSMRC said these findings are contained in the 2013 NI 43-101-compliant Technical Report and Preliminary Feasibility Study of M3 Engineering & Technology, a US-based consultancy firm contracted by St. Augustine Gold & Copper to conduct the study in compliance with Canada's National Instrument 43-101, which is supposedly required under Canadian laws. The copper-gold project was reportedly to be approved within this month, the group said.

FSMRC further quoted the report as saying that several of the wildlife species found in the region "are listed as near-threatened or vulnerable by the IUCN, while others are protected by Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Sea cows and whale sharks also live in the region. The sea cow species and all species of sea turtle found in the region are listed as endangered," the report said. "Phyto-, nano-, zoo-, and ichthyoplankton, as well as coral and benthic species were found in abundance during oceanographic surveys which included diving surveys. The sea grass density ranged from 772.0 to 3,174.2 shoots per square meter," it noted.

For its part, FSMRC said that aside from addressing the threats to biodiversity, the Aquino government must "look at the adverse social impact this foreign-owned mining project will impose not only on the five barangays directly within the project area but also on neighboring communities whose water supply will also be affected".

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

### **Citizen science project offers unique volunteering opportunities with vital Seagrass habitats (UK)**

*02 November 2015, Dartmouth-Today*

Salcombe is a prime seagrass habitat and a new citizen science project is providing unique opportunities for local residents. The National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth has launched the first seagrass based citizen science project in the South West. The Community Seagrass Initiative has been awarded £475,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund to provide opportunities for volunteers to get involved in marine science. The project will survey 191 miles of coastline from Looe to Weymouth, specifically looking at seagrass beds.

Many seagrass meadows, or beds, exist around South West England, Wales and West coast of Scotland, as well as around the world. Seagrass meadows are home to some of the most charismatic species in the UK such as seahorses and cuttlefish, and act as a nursery ground for commercial fish species. This vital habitat is in decline by seven per cent a year caused by coastal threats such as pollution, coastal development and increased water use over the habitat. It is in need of a management plan, but first the health must be assessed.

The three project officers who will run this project in the South West for at least the next three years, are keen to reach out to the coastal communities to recruit volunteer divers, kayakers, boat users, teachers and internet users to help with the surveys.

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

*related articles:*

*[\*\[today.co.uk/article.cfm?id=101397&headline=Citizen%20science%20project%20offers%20unique%20volunteering%20opportunities%20with%20vital%20Seagrass%20habitats&sectionIs=news&searchyear=2015\]\(http://www.kingsbridge-today.co.uk/article.cfm?id=101397&headline=Citizen%20science%20project%20offers%20unique%20volunteering%20opportunities%20with%20vital%20Seagrass%20habitats&sectionIs=news&searchyear=2015\)\*](http://www.kingsbridge-</a></i></p></div><div data-bbox=)*

### **Sri Lanka holds workshop on Dugong and Seagrass Conservation (Sri Lanka)**

*01 November 2015, Colombo Page*

Sri Lanka recently held a workshop on the Dugong and Seagrass Conservation in Colombo with the participation of Minister of Sustainable Development and Wildlife Gamini Jayawickrema Perera. The inauguration of the workshop was held on 20th Oct 2015 at the Hotel Cinnamon lakeside, Colombo. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Dugong and Seagrass Project will enhance the effectiveness of conservation efforts for dugongs and their associated

seagrass ecosystems across eight Indian and Pacific Ocean basin countries, namely Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mozambique, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste and Vanuatu.

The Dugong is a large slow moving marine herbivore inhabiting the sea grass beds of the shallow littoral of the island, currently restricted to the Gulf of Mannar area and the surrounding shallow islets. At the beginning of the last century, records indicate large "herds" of Dugong feeding in the Jaffna Lagoon and were very commonly encountered during the pearl fishery of by-gone days. These encounters have, unfortunately for this mammal, resulted in its falling victim to the dietary preferences of humans. Today, the Dugong can really be categorized as the "most endangered mammal" in Sri Lanka.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List lists the dugong as Vulnerable. The dugong is rarely sighted and it is at a high risk of extinction throughout most of its vast range. Projections indicate that the dugong faces extinction within the next 40 years. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Dugong and Seagrass Project is the first coordinated global effort to conserve dugongs and their seagrass habitats and Sri Lanka is a partner country of the project.

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

### ***Teh calls for protection of seagrass heritage area (Malaysia)***

*29 November 2015, Free Malaysia Today*

Tanjung Bungah assemblyman Teh Yee Cheu wants the state government to immediately gazette the seagrass beds of Middle Bank in the South Channel as a natural ecosystem heritage area. He said it was not enough for the state government just to announce that it had cancelled a proposed project to reclaim Middle Bank. He said the state government must actualise its sincerity to preserve and conserve the area and de-gazette the Middle Bank as a proposed reclamation area under the Penang Structural Plan 2007.

Middle Bank lies, near the Sungai Pinang river mouth, halfway between the ferry terminal and Penang Bridge, and houses the country's second largest seagrass bed after the Sungai Pulai estuary near Tanjung Kupang in the Straits of Johor. At low tide, the seagrass becomes visible, resembling a huge verdant carpet near the Sungai Pinang river mouth. Middle Bank was earmarked as the site of a transport hub on reclaimed land to be the centre for all public transport systems for the island, including a monorail and a light rail transit systems.

On Friday, the state government announced that it had dropped the idea to reclaim Middle Bank due to environmental concerns, and the transport hub would now be located in the George Town city centre, near Komtar. Penang Barisan Nasional chairman Teng Chang Yeow claimed that the state government had dropped Middle Bank proposed reclamation in a deal with SRS Consortium, the state government's project partner for the transport plan. He said the state government had allowed the company to reclaim 4,100 acres of sea off Permatang Damar Laut in Bayan Lepas, three kilometres from Penang International Airport. SRS Consortium's project director Szeto Wai Loong told the press last week that the reclamation was to fund the transport plan.

*Full story: <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2015/11/29/teh-calls-for-protection-of-seagrass-heritage-area/>*

### ***Dugong saviours hailed (Bahrain)***

*24 November 2015, Bahrain News Agency*

Supreme Council for the Environment (SCE) Chief Executive Office Dr. Mohammed Mubarak bin Daina received fishermen Mohammed Althawadi, Abdulrahman Althawadi and Ali Ayedi and thanked them for their efforts to save Dugongs.

A video footage posted online showed the efforts of the of the three fishermen, from Muharraq, to save the marine mammals aged 6 to 12 months old. Dr. bin Daina hailed Bahrainis' environmental awareness as well as keenness on conserving their country's biodiversity. Bahrain territorial waters abound in dugongs which are classified as endangered species under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

*Story: <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/697906>*

### ***The battle to protect Wakatobi, Indonesia's world-renowned diving destination (Indonesia)***

*17 November 2015, Coconuts Jakarta*

In 2006, then Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono made an ambitious promise to conserve a "global epicenter of marine life abundance and diversity." Indonesia would preserve 10 million hectares of ocean lying in the Coral Triangle, Yudhoyono said at the landmark UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Rio di Janeiro. Three years later, he doubled Indonesia's commitment, vowing to preserve 20 million hectares of ocean by 2020.

Indonesia has already declared 16.6 million of its targeted 20 million hectares of MPAs. But most of these declared MPAs are in nascent stages and have yet to even be zoned. In contrast, the 1.39 million hectare Wakatobi National Park was established and therefore designated a protected area in 1998. It was zoned in 2007, initially with a little under 44,000 hectares of no-take zones. International NGOs, namely the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and The Nature



Conservancy (TNC), have worked with local partners to bolster monitoring and management practices, to great success.

British University of Portsmouth researcher Ian Hendy, has been researching Wakatobi's mangroves for the last 10 years. Returning to one of his long-term study sites on Kaledupa Island, Hendy estimated 15 percent of the island's mangrove forest had been destroyed by local community members seeking firewood and construction materials. Near Hendy's mangrove sites, Indonesian Institute of Sciences ecologist Andri Irawan measured seagrass cover in the shallows of Hoga Island. Irawan is still processing his research results from transects on all of the national park's islands so he could not comment on the current state of seagrass bed health in Wakatobi. But the young researcher did emphasize the importance of monitoring seagrass in general.

Across Indonesia, regional government reclamation projects have paved over seagrass habitat. On Wakatobi's Wangi-Wangi Island, where seagrass cover is thickest, according to 2008-2010 park survey data, the local government has three reclamation projects underway – for a marina expansion, a road and a new seaside mosque. Irawan and Hendy's observations are disconcerting because there is a lot to be lost along Wakatobi's diverse coastline. There are 396 identified species of coral, 590 species of fish and 11 of the 12 species of seagrass endemic to Indonesia, according to 2008-2010 park survey data.

The success of Indonesia's bold commitment to marine conservation depends, in large part, on the way Wakatobi's MPA system goes. Is the conservation initiative moving toward sustainable footing, or will it go the way of many conservation projects before it that peter out when the initial enthusiasm and funding ends?

*Full Story: <http://jakarta.coconuts.co/2015/11/17/battle-protect-wakatobi-indonesias-world-renowned-diving-destination>*

## CONFERENCES

### ***The 13th International Coral Reef Symposium (ICRS) (Hawai'i, 19–24 June 2016)***

Theme: Bridging Science to Policy.

The world's major coral reef science meeting, the International Coral Reef Symposium (ICRS), is held every four years. It is the primary international meeting focused on coral reef science and management. The Symposium will bring together an anticipated 2,500 coral reef scientists, policy makers and managers from 70 different nations in a forum to present the latest research findings, case histories and management activities, and to discuss the application of scientific knowledge to achieving coral reef sustainability.

ICRS2016 will include a Taxon-specific session on seagrass: Session H, 26 - Integrating seagrass science and management in a coral reef framework

Key Dates

- 15 January 2016 – Abstract Submission and Early Registration Close
- February 2016 - Authors Notified of Acceptance
- March 2016 - Session Schedule Posted and Presenters Notified of Session Assignments
- April 2016 - Full Scientific Program Schedule Posted
- 16 May 2016 - Registration Cancellation Deadline (Last Day to Receive a Refund)
- 19-24 June 2016 - Meeting

for more information, visit <http://sgmeet.com/icrs2016/default.asp>

### ***The 12th International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW12) (Wales, 17-23 October 2016)***

Theme: Declining seagrasses in a changing world.

The International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW) is the only international meeting specifically tailored to seagrass scientists, professionals and students.

The International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW) provides a good opportunity for the scientists working on various aspects of seagrass ecosystems to come together and discuss their latest findings. The ISBW12 will be held from 17-23 October 2016 at Nant Gwytheyrn, Gwynedd, Wales, organized by Project Seagrass and the Seagrass Ecosystems Research Group. The conference email address is [ISBW2016@projectseagrass.org](mailto:ISBW2016@projectseagrass.org).

We as scientists know the devastating effects that humanity is having on our worlds seagrass meadows. Although much work is needed to keep documenting, understanding and highlighting the problems facing seagrass we as a research community need to also provide a voice of optimism about how we can make changes to ensure survival of these precious ecosystems. We must go beyond science, and use it to inform policy and management, and ultimately to catalyze change. We know that there are many examples of this, from stakeholder led management and successful restoration to improvements in water quality and the management of boating activities. We encourage participants to contribute stories of seagrass conservation success in order to strengthen this theme. We also encourage submission of research stories that aim to provide evidence to make future successes.

Let's make ISBW12 a conference that celebrates seagrasses and has a spirit of #oceanoptimism

The workshop therefore has 4 key themes that will form the structure of the sessions held throughout the week. These are:

- Resilience and a changing environment
- Ecosystem services
- Restoration and management
- Raising the profile of seagrass meadows

for more information, visit <http://isbw12.org/>

## GALLERY

**Porthdinlleian, Llyn Peninsula (Wales): 26 November 2015** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

With an early morning low tide (3:17am), the Project seagrass team were out monitoring their Porthdinlleian site. Researchers were disappointed to also find tracks through their monitoring site.

**Great Sandy Strait , QLD (Australia): 23 - 25 November 2015** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

After a Level 1 training course in late August, Cooloola Coastcare began monitoring seagrass in the Great Sandy Strait in September. By 25 November, a total of 13 sites were sampled. A breakthrough this year has been the wonderful support of the Tin Can Bay Fishing Club and the Tin Can Bay Coastguard who are partnering with Coastcare to transport them to 'off-the-beaten-track' sites on the western side of Fraser Island and off-shore areas where boat access is required.

Reef Islands: 25 November 2015

Poona: 23 November 2015

## 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 39,365 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 Richard Unsworth and *notes from the field* by Dr 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.