



# Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

**31 May 2015**

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## **Great Barrier Reef spared 'in danger' listing - for now**

29 May 2015, BBC News

The Great Barrier Reef should not go on a World Heritage danger list, according to a United Nations draft report. However, it says Australia must carry out commitments to protect the reef, including restoring water quality and restricting new port developments. The final decision on its status will be made at the World Heritage Committee meeting in Germany next month.

Conservationists have warned that the outlook for the reef is "poor". A report published in 2014 concluded that the condition "is expected to further deteriorate in the future". Climate change, extreme weather, and pollution from industry were listed as key concerns. However, in 2015 Australia submitted a plan to the UN heritage body, Unesco, outlining how it would address these threats. This included a proposed objective of reducing pollution by 80% before 2025, as well as reversing a decision to allow dredged material to be dumped near the reef.

The Unesco draft report says that Australia must implement this 35-year action plan, and Unesco will continue to check on its progress. The matter - along with the future of other World Heritage sites - will be debated at a Unesco meeting taking place in Bonn from 28 June to 8 July.

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

*Related articles:*

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## **Indigenous people to help with turtle and dugong rescues in far north Queensland (QLD, Australia)**

29 May 2015, ABC Online

A Queensland researcher is enlisting the help of local Indigenous people in preventing turtle and dugong deaths on beaches in the state's far north. Cairns Turtle Rehab Centre researcher Dr Jennie Gilbert said the turtles are starving and dying on beaches around Cooktown because recent cyclones destroyed seagrass beds they feed on.

Dr Gilbert said 35 Indigenous people are being trained to rescue sick or stranded turtles off the beach and provide care at a rehabilitation centre. The turtles will also be tracked after being released. The training will involve taking the turtles from the beach caring for them at Cooktown's turtle rehabilitation centre. Dr Gilbert said the local people were on the front line and keen to learn how best to respond to stranded animals.

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

## **Local Youth Study Florida Bay (FL, USA)**

28 May 2015, South Dade News Leader

Everglades National Park is known for its unique habitat and great wildlife. Nearly 1/3 of the park's 1.5 million acres [is] a place where Manatees graze on seagrass and marine invertebrates along with fish hide within the mangrove roots, and schools of dolphin play in the wake of fishing boats. Florida Bay is almost totally within the park boundaries stretching from the Florida keys to the Gulf Coast, an expanse of half a million acres of water and sea bottom. Despite its ecological importance and value many people in south Florida do not know why it is critically important to protect and preserve the Bay. This is one of the many reasons why the park started a program called Florida Bay Day several years ago.

Through a generous grant from the Ocean Reef Foundation and the South Florida National Parks Trust, Everglades National Park partnered with Florida International University to host five Florida Bay Day programs this school year. This school year students from Key Largo School, Treasure Village Montessori, and Ocean Reef Academy participated in the program. The students visited two different sites on Florida Bay and collected a variety of data including water salinity, turbidity and temperature. After they have collected important data while onboard a boat, they

get to take the data gathering into the water! Suiting up with a snorkel and mask the students break into smaller groups and study the growth of seagrass at specified locations. The students then have some free time to snorkel around both sites and observe the amazing biodiversity that live in the seagrass beds and along the edge of mangrove islands.

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

### **Queensland's government will ban capital dredging to protect the Great Barrier Reef (QLD, Australia)**

*27 May 2015, Herald Sun*

Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk says the new laws are designed to ensure port development along the reef is sustainable. It's understood the Sustainable Ports Development Bill, to be introduced to parliament next week, will ban capital dredging for new harbours or channels along the coast near the reef. Capital dredging enlarges existing shipping waterways. The laws will also ensure further expansions of existing ports are planned sustainably, Ms Palaszczuk says.

Labor promised to bring in the new laws during the January state election. Ms Palaszczuk has also pledged to ensure the reef isn't listed by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee as a World Heritage Site in danger. The UN body is due to hand down its draft decision on the status of the reef on Friday night.

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*<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-27/laws-protecting-the-great-barrier-reef-to-be-introduced/6500174>*

### **Potential of seagrass in combating climate change**

*27 May 2015, Phys.Org*

Seagrass ecosystems could play a key role in combating climate change, researchers at the University of York have discovered. The marine flowering plant also helps sustain abundant sea life and protects shorelines around the world from coastal erosion. Lead author PhD student Adam Hejnowicz said: "Seagrass meadows could play a vital role in combating climate change as they are regarded as a net global sink for carbon. However, realizing the "true" potential of seagrass meadows requires international cooperation, he said. The research is published in *Frontiers in Marine Science*.

Seagrass meadows are able to store large amounts of carbon but historically they have been virtually ignored in global carbon budgets. The prospects for developing a pure carbon credit scheme remain slim, especially if targeted at the regulatory carbon market, the researchers argue. However, opportunities exist for voluntary carbon market schemes. Adam Hejnowicz added: "The main problem is that seagrasses are still not properly and adequately accounted for in formal carbon climate policies. "We advocate complementing any carbon-based management approaches with other incentive schemes such as payment for ecosystem service programmes."

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

### **GBRMPA boosts commitments to save Great Barrier Reef (QLD, Australia)**

*27 May 2015, Maine News Online*

In a bid to monitor the Great Barrier Reef and to avoid it being placed on UNESCO's endangered list, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's (GBRMPA's) chairman Russell Reichelt has claimed that the federal and Queensland governments have boosted their commitments to tackle the problem. UNESCO is making a decision to place the Great Barrier Reef on the 'endangered' list. However, the chairman of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, (GBRMPA) Russell Reichelt, said that although the reef faces serious threats, and the government is making efforts to tackle the problem. He mentioned that the biggest threat to the reef is posed by long-term climate change, especially coral bleaching caused by warmer ocean temperatures, followed by run-off from agricultural land.

Although, the ALP and the Greens senators suggested that the GBRMPA would struggle with budget cuts, Dr. Reichelt claimed that the agency was funded adequately. Dr. Reichelt added that he was encouraged by the \$140 million in extra funding from the federal government. It aims to improve water quality and tackle the crown of thorns starfish, which are also a threat to the reef. GBRMPA had a \$4.5 million cut from its annual expenditure of \$49 million in May's budget. It also included redundancies of five people. However, Dr. Reichelt said it would just require some more 'belt-tightening'.

In order to monitor the Great Barrier Reef to avoid being placed on UNESCO's endangered list, the federal government and Queensland government have boosted their commitments. On early Sunday, a draft decision will be released before a final, binding decision next month.

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

## **Great Barrier Reef facing serious threat, but 'in danger' Unesco listing not warranted, scientists say (Australia)**

26 May 2015, ABC Online

Queensland's leading researchers on the Great Barrier Reef have predicted the area will not be listed as "in danger" by the United Nations body Unesco, although it does face serious threats. A recommendation will be handed down this week, advising Unesco's World Heritage Committee on whether to list the reef as being in danger.

Professor Terry Hughes from James Cook University in north Queensland said there could be no doubt the reef faced serious threats. But he said the Queensland and Commonwealth governments were making moves towards change. Threats including coastal development, agricultural run-off and climate change has resulted in 50 per cent of the reef's coral cover disappearing in the past 30 years. There have also been declines in numbers of dugongs and sea birds, and in the water quality.

Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg from the University of Queensland has been studying the gradual decline of the reef using records dating back to 1928. The early researchers travelled to Low Isles in far north Queensland and sketched the coral coverings. Professor Hoegh-Guldberg said modern images of that same patch showed there had been a dramatic change in the ecosystem. Professor Hoegh-Guldberg said the change seen at Low Isles had been repeated across the Great Barrier Reef. But he said it was not enough to warrant listing the reef as in danger.

Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt said a record amount was being spent to address problems on the reef and he was confident it would avoid the listing.

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

## **A call to stop traditional feast on meat of endangered sea turtles (Malaysia)**

23 May 2015, Jakarta Post

Conservationists have called on traditional communities in the Mentawai Islands, West Sumatra, to stop catching and eating sea turtles as the protected animal is on the verge of extinction and those consuming it are at risk of poisoning. Padang's Bung Hatta University Turtle Information and Data Center head Harfiandri Damanhuri said the Mentawai community has long had a tradition to hunt for turtle meat for communal and wedding feasts. The tradition is still taking place in a number of coastal villages. He said two sea turtle species were usually caught in Mentawai: the green turtle and the hawksbill turtle.

At least nine mass incidents of food poisoning from consuming turtle meat have been recorded in Mentawai since 2005, during which 30 people were killed. The latest incident took place in Sao hamlet on Sipora Island on March 24, 2013, which led to 148 people being taken to hospital and four of them dying, including an 11-month-old baby who was poisoned through breast milk. The highest number of victims was recorded in June 2006 in Sibuddak Oinan hamlet on Siberut Island when 13 people who were preparing for a wedding feast were killed.

Despite the tough challenge to change the habit, said Harfiandri, the cases of poisoning have served as an effective campaign to urge the community to stop catching turtles. After the last poisoning case in 2013, the Mentawai Islands regent issued a circular against catching and eating turtle meat. Gerson Saleleubaja, a resident of Siberut in Mentawai, said turtle hunting was still taking place in the islands. Consumption of turtle meat is considered a necessity in the coastal villages during traditional ceremonies, such as for building boats, opening farms and building the uma homes, while residents usually replace turtle meat with pork during wedding parties.

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

## **Rapid action necessary to protect Malaysian sea cows and their habitat (Malaysia)**

22 May 2015, Phys.Org

Malaysia aims to protect 10% of its marine environment by 2020. Less than 1%, however, is currently protected. This may have dire consequences for the country's endangered dugong population, warn a Malaysian scientist and her research team.

Dr Louisa Ponnampalam, a research fellow at the University of Malaya, first conducted aerial surveys in 2010 around the islands on the south-eastern coast of West Malaysia – known as the Mersing group of islands – to assess the local dugong population. Her initial surveys covered almost 3,000km of water over a period of eight consecutive days and resulted in 93 sightings of dugongs, 22 of which consisted of mother-calf pairs. The highest concentrations of dugongs coincided with areas that have known seagrass meadows, but only 38% of sightings fell within the boundaries of local marine parks.

Dr Ponnampalam's research suggests that the Mersing islands host the most significant congregation of dugongs in peninsular Malaysia. However, these areas are affected by trawl fishing (including encroachment into marine park areas), vessel traffic, agricultural plantations near the coast and mixed coastal developments. These are known to



cause habitat degradation and water pollution and to threaten marine life. In 2015, the research team plans to expand its study to include seagrass mapping, an investigation of dugong feeding trails, and an assessment of the total economic value of the main dugong areas in the Mersing islands and its seagrass meadows.

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

### **Turtle eggs sold in Terengganu are brought in illegally (Malaysia)**

22 May 2015, *New Straits Times Online*

About 90 per cent of turtle eggs sold in the state are brought in illegally from neighbouring countries. The state Fisheries Department said the turtle eggs were believed to have been smuggled in by fishermen who later distributed the eggs to traders in markets. State Fisheries director Abdul Khalil Abdul Karim said most of the eggs sold in the markets were from the green turtle species and are shaped like ping pong ball.

As for the other 10 per cent, he said the eggs were obtained from turtle landing points in the state. Khalil said of the 46 landing points in the state, 12 were active landing points that were controlled by the department as incubation centres.

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### **Tampa Bay seagrass beds herald environmental recovery (USA)**

14 May 2015, *TBO.com*

Tampa Bay's seagrass beds, a critical component of a healthy estuary, have rebounded to such a remarkable degree that their health is as robust as it was 60 years ago, water resource scientists and environmentalists say. A Southwest Florida Water Management District 2014 seagrass mapping survey released this week counted 40,295 acres of healthy seagrass, the most in the system since 1950, before dredging and pollution began carving away at the sea grass plains. Twenty-three years ago, the Tampa Bay Estuary Program set a recovery goal of 38,000 acres and the news this week was greeted by optimism and satisfaction. The survey showed an increase of 5,600 acres from the most recent mapping done in 2012. That's a 16.3 percent jump, estuary officials say, and the fourth consecutive year in which increases were recorded.

The dramatic increase in seagrass and an improvement in water quality over the past couple of decades is being watched by others across the nation, said Peter Clark, CEO of Tampa Bay Watch and board chairman of Restore America's Estuaries, an organization of environmentalists from as far away as Connecticut, Rhode Island and California. "Seagrass was our canary in the coal mine, major losses occurred when Tampa Bay was in distress," said Kris Kaufman, senior environmental scientist for the water management district, in a statement announcing the findings. Keeping an eye on sea grass beds is important, Kaufman said, because it is a gauge of the bay's overall health. Seagrass requires relatively clean water to flourish and is sensitive to changes in water quality and clarity. Seagrass mostly grows in water less than 6 feet deep, but in the clear water around Egmont and Anclote keys, beds can be found in water 10 feet deep or more.

Besides being an indicator of water quality, seagrasses are natural fish factories. They shelter and support a variety of juvenile fish, shrimp, crabs, marine worms and other marine creatures. Biologists say spotted sea trout, sea horses and bay scallops are among the species that live in seagrass beds. Fish Fanatic Charters Capt. Josh Simmons has noticed a difference, though he can't say if it's just expanded sea grass flats that have made the difference. Simmons, who fishes out of Ruskin along Hillsborough County's south shore, said fishing has improved over the past five years. Seagrass provides a lot of protection for juvenile fish hiding from predators, he said.

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### **Erosion and soil chemicals a priority to improve reef water (Australia)**

14 May 2015, *The Sunshine Coast Daily*

Managing pesticide from the Mackay and Fitzroy regions and combating erosion from the Mary and Burnett catchments have been listed among the top priorities in a state government strategy to protect the Great Barrier Reef. The State Government released the reef water quality strategy in Townsville on Thursday, only weeks ahead of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee's decision on whether to list the reef as 'in danger'.

The government strategy report contained a list of priorities for Queensland coastal catchments to help reduce degraded water quality on the reef. Combating erosion from cattle grazing and cropping in the Fitzroy region was listed among the first priorities to improve reef water quality along with reducing nitrogen from fertiliser in the wet tropics and erosion in the Burdekin. Addressing pesticide from sugarcane in all catchments in the Mackay and Whitsundays region was listed as a second priority. Reducing fertiliser nitrogen from sugarcane in the Mackay and

Whitsundays area was listed as a third priority, along with erosion management from grazing in the Mary and Burnett catchments. Also listed as a third priority was reducing pesticide from grazing and cropping in the Fitzroy region.

The report said whole-farm pesticide and weed management was critical to limiting the impacts on reef water quality. The report also explained how erosion from cropping and grazing affected the reef. It said emerging research had shown that fine fractions of soil from grazing, cane and other cropping lands were the most likely to reach and impact on reef systems, particularly in wider flatter reef catchments such as the Burdekin and Fitzroy catchments. State environment minister Steven Miles said this four-year strategy outlined the government's target to reduce nitrogen by 80% and sediment flowing from reef catchments by 50% by 2025. This strategy is part of the State Government's \$100 million over five years on programs to improve the health of the reef.

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

### **What's eating you? Solving the seagrass mystery (Australia)**

13 May 2015, Science Network Western Australia

The waters of the Bardi Jawi Indigenous Protection Area (IPA), 160km north of Broome, are paradise for seagrass: warm water, lots of light and a pristine, protected environment means these seagrasses grow fast, so why are they so short? The answer, according to CSIRO marine ecologist Dr Mat Vanderklift, could change the way we think about healthy seagrass systems.

Working with the Bardi Jawi Rangers, Dr Vanderklift is part of an ongoing collaborative project to learn more about ecological processes in the Kimberley. "We're currently focused on understanding how much seagrass is being eaten, and what's eating it," he says. The team's 2014 work indicates part of the answer lies with the rabbitfish (*Siganus lineatus*) or barrbal, a food source important to local communities. The initial clues, he says, came from the mouth morphology and gut contents of a single fish. Subsequent analysis of 30 barrbal caught in three places around islands in the Bardi Jawi IPA indicated "half to three-quarters of what's in their stomach is seagrass," Dr Vanderklift says.

Recently the team have turned their attention to green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) or goorlil, tagging the herbivores to study how often and when they use seagrass beds. Dr Vanderklift says he is excited by what the team has already achieved and will continue to learn.

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

### **Report card to show Great Barrier Reef on mend (Australia)**

12 May 2015, Courier Mail

The health of the Great Barrier Reef is gradually returning, with water quality improving and coral and seagrass blooming. A yet-to-be-released report by the Australian Institute of Marine Science will show the Reef slowly regaining its health as repairs start to take effect.

The report's results are at the heart of an investigation by the World Heritage Committee on Australia's care for the planet's greatest reef. If Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt cannot convince UNESCO that Australia is doing enough to turn reef degradation around, the World Heritage area will be listed in danger next month, potentially affecting \$5.8 billion in tourist visits annually.

Dr Schaffelke said it could be tricky to distinguish how much the weather influenced water-quality improvements and how much was due to better land management. Mr Hunt said no firm date had been set for the report's release but Australia had addressed every concern raised by the World Heritage Committee and last week set up the Reef Trust specifically to tackle water-quality issues. Meanwhile, Queensland Resources Council boss Michael Roche has lashed out at Virgin billionaire Richard Branson's call on Twitter for the reef to be listed in danger by UNESCO.

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

### **Middle Bank approved by BN (Malaysia)**

12 May 2015, Free Malaysia Today

Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng clarified on Monday that the Middle Bank sea site in Penang Channel was earmarked for reclamation under the Penang Structural Plan 2007. The proposed reclamation project is part of the state government's proposed RM27 billion Penang Transport Master Plan (TMP). The structural plan, as distinct from the Penang Island Local Plan, governs town and country planning. The structural plan is scheduled for review every five years, the last in 2012.

Tanjong Bunga assemblyman Teh Yee Cheu raised the Middle Bank issue in the House and called on the state government to drop the proposed reclamation project. He wants the Penang Government to degazette the Middle Bank as a potential reclamation site in the structural plan and regazette it as a marine park. He stressed that the state government does not need to wait for the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report on the reclamation.

Middle Bank in Penang Channel is located near Sungai Pinang river mouth between the ferry terminal and the Penang Bridge. The 607ha Middle Bank houses the only seagrass bed in Penang waters and among a handful of its kind in the Straits of Malacca. Seagrass bed covers a third of Middle Bank, which is the second largest in the country after the Sungai Pulai estuary near Tanjung Kupang in the Straits of Johor.

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

### **Time ticking in race to save Barrier Reef (Australia)**

*08 May 2015, Sky News Australia*

It's a great race against time to prevent Australia having its crown jewel - The Great Barrier Reef - put on UNESCO'S World Heritage 'danger' list. The Queensland and federal governments have taken significant steps this year to retain the reef's status - and it will soon become clear whether the country has done enough to protect the natural wonder. Many consider an 'in danger' listing an embarrassment given Australia's relative national wealth.

The state government revealed the make-up of a new 23-strong Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce, part of a long-term reef management plan announced in March, to tackle one of its biggest threats: the quality of water running into the reef and its catchments. The federal government announced the rollout of a second phase of Reef Trust projects worth \$15 million, with almost half to be spent on controlling the outbreak of coral eating crown-of-thorns starfish.

Four years ago, the first whispers of the reef being put on the list of shame came as UNESCO's World Heritage Committee got wind of a plan to build gas plants on the doorstep of the reef. The following year, in 2012, the committee issued its first warning to Australia: do more to protect one of the great wonders of the world or risk having it listed as a site in danger. A decision over an 'in danger' listing has since twice been delayed by the committee.

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

### **Climate 'milestone' reached as global carbon dioxide levels surpass 400ppm**

*07 May 2015, Blue & Green Tomorrow*

Global carbon dioxide concentrations have surpassed 400 parts per million (ppm) for the first month since measurements began, the latest results from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) show. According to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the concentration of all greenhouse gases, including methane and other gasses that are not included in NOAA's measurement, must not exceed 450ppm this century in order to limit global warming.

The figures highlight that stabilising the rate of emissions is not enough to avert climate change. NOAA data shows that the average growth rate of carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere from 2012 to 2014 was 2.25ppm per year, the highest ever recorded over three consecutive years. This is despite figures from the International Energy Agency indicating that global emissions stalled in 2014.

The organisation expects global average levels of carbon dioxide to remain above the 400ppm threshold through May as concentrations peak due to natural cycles on top of rising greenhouse gas emissions. Last year in April carbon in the atmosphere exceeded 400ppm for the entire month for the first time in at least 800,000 years. Following the record levels, the UN World Meteorological Organisation warned that time was running out to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

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

### **Land project funds hoped to keep reef from 'in danger' list (Australia)**

*07 May 2015, Northern Star*

Projects to control erosion and sediment run-off into the Great Barrier Reef and battle the crown-of-thorns starfish will be funded this year. Environment Minister Greg Hunt said another \$15 million of the \$140 million Reef Trust has been allocated to projects around Queensland. Among them were fencing and remediating riparian zones, a tender to reduce fertiliser run-off from sugar cane farms, and \$7 million to cull the coral-eating starfish. The funds come as the government tries to stave off a World Heritage Committee decision that could see the reef listed as "in danger".

While Mr Hunt said the government "knows the reef retains the values for which it was listed as a World Heritage site in 1981", the latest reef Outlook report showed more than half of those values in decline. Land managers and scientists have urged the government to increase funds by at least \$1 billion to prevent the further decline of the reef, in hopes of improving the outlook for the reef.

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

## **New Barrier Reef taskforce announced (Australia)**

07 May 2015, Sky News Australia

The Queensland government has announced the make-up of a new Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce promised at the state election. Great Barrier Reef Minister Steven Miles said the 23-person taskforce, lead by the state's chief scientist Dr Geoff Garrett, includes experts drawn from the science, business, agriculture and community sectors.

'The taskforce has been given the job of grappling head on with one of the most significant threats to the long-term health and sustainability of the Great Barrier Reef: the quality of water running into reef catchments,' Dr Miles said.

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

## **Labor Government moves to protect Great Barrier Reef with dedicated office (Australia)**

07 May 2015, Courier Mail

A new office will be created within the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection to exclusively deal with Great Barrier Reef issues. State Environment Minister Steven Miles today told Parliament the new office would allow a "higher degree of accountability".

Dr Miles also said Queensland's chief scientist, Dr Geoff Garrett, had been appointed to head up the taskforce, announced during the election campaign, that will advise the State on how to spend the \$100 million over five years it set aside to tackle its "ambitious" water quality targets. "The taskforce will harness the wealth of expertise, experience and knowledge across reef and water quality issues, land management practice and the different industries that operate within the reef catchment," Dr Miles said.

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

## **Proposed Gozo cruise terminal site sits on marine grass with high EU protection status (Malta)**

30 May 2015, by Kevin Schembri Orland Saturday, Malta Independent Online

The Marine protected area on the site proposed for the Gozo Cruise Liner terminal is home to around 85% of *Posidonia oceanica* seagrass meadows commonly known as Neptune grass, which receives the highest level of EU protection, Marine Biologist Alan Deidun told the Malta Independent. There are five marine protected areas around Malta, he said, and the one that covers the site ranges from St Georges Bay in Malta to beyond Marsalforn, he said, encompassing the Eastern part of Gozo as well as Comino. Professor Deidun is quite concerned at the damage that a cruise liner terminal and a yacht marina can cause if built in Simar.

Chapman Taylor in Milan had proposed the site to build the terminal, as well as a contemporary yacht marina and the quarry present there, according to their plans, would be excavated and settled in a limestone cove. They also plan for apartments to be built as well as villas.

Professor Deidun said the marine protected area was designated in 2010 through a government gazette notice. He stressed that "unfortunately, like other marine protected areas around the islands, there is no implementation of management measures and no one is monitoring the situation". He stressed that while the land part of the project has already been disturbed considering the quarry site, the marine area has not.

*Full story: <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2015-05-30/local-news/Proposed-cruise-liner-site-sits-on-marine-grass-with-high-EU-protection-status-Alan-Deidun-6736136443>*

## **Conservationists block Toledo reclamation project (Philippines)**

23 May 2015, by Liberty A. Pinili, Sun Star Cebu

Marine conservation groups vowed to oppose a reclamation project that the Toledo City Government wants to implement off Barangay Poblacion. Divers of Sea Knights and Oceana Philippines found seagrass beds, juvenile fishes and a sea horse despite the heavily silted waters off Barangay Poblacion, Toledo City. The divers, however, did not find corals in the site of the proposed 11-hectare reclamation project, which faces the protected Tañon Strait.

But Danny Ocampo of Oceana Philippines said this should not be used to justify the reclamation project. Lawyer Joan Dulhao, Sea Knights vice president, said that seagrass beds are important to fisheries because they provide food and shelter to juvenile fish. Ocampo said the findings of the assessment raises the need to rehabilitate the marine ecosystem in the area. Ocampo said Oceana will use its resources to oppose the reclamation project.

Soquiño was referring to a case filed against an energy development project by conservationists on behalf of dolphins in the Tañon Strait. A Supreme Court decision declared the energy development project unconstitutional, noting that it should have obtained an environmental compliance certificate.

*Full story: <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/cebu/local-news/2015/05/23/conservationists-block-toledo-reclamation-project-409130>*



## **LGUs urged to intensify fight vs. Visayan Sea illegal fishers (Philippines)**

22 May 2105, *Visayan Daily Star*

The Iloilo provincial government is reiterating its call to all chief executives and agencies concerned to be active in clearing the Visayan Sea of illegal fishers. Provincial Administrator Raul Baniyas, in a press release, lamented that it seems that only the Iloilo Provincial Bantay Dagat Task Force is sustaining its operation and issued the statement after the 34 positive operations of the task force more than a month after their members were reshuffled April 15.

Fisheries Administrative Order 246 bans the operation of Danish seine and modified Danish seine nationwide since 2013. Any person found violating the order will face two to ten years imprisonment, or fined not less than P100,000, or both. The fishing boat and its gear will also be confiscated. Before FAO 222 was issued the operation of modified Danish seine in water beyond 15 kilometers from the shoreline of any municipality was allowed provided that it shall not use tom weights or any method or accessories that can destroy the coral reefs, seagrass bed, and other marine habitats. The minimum mesh size of the net shall not also be less than three centimeters, the press release also said.

In 2011, the governors of Iloilo, Cebu, Masbate, and Negros Occidental signed a covenant to protect, conserve and rehabilitate the coastal and marine resources of the Visayan Marine Triangle. The four met regularly to update one another on their achievements in maritime law enforcement. Last year, they passed a resolution urging President Benigno Aquino III to declare the Visayan Sea a marine protected area. The resolution sought to declare and establish as protected area the waters beyond the 15-kilometer radius of any municipality and city surrounding the Visayan Sea. If no one will support and act on it, the campaign to protect the Visayan Sea, that is used to be the richest fishing ground in the Philippines, will be in vain, the press release added.

Full story: <http://www.visayandailystar.com/2015/May/22/negor1.htm>

## **Excess seagrass wrack on Busselton beaches could be removed without damage to the environment (WA, Australia)**

20 May 2015, by Sharon Kennedy, *ABC Local*

Seagrass washed up on Busselton beaches after weekend storms is causing a smelly problem. Marine biologist Pia Winburg says that any resolution for residents needs to be based on good science. A marine biologist at the University of Wollongong, Dr Winburg told ABC WA Drive that both seaweeds and seagrasses can be tumbled ashore. However, seagrasses are the plants usually washed up after storms. Storms such as those that occurred last weekend rip up the grasses, and loosen organic debris in the sediment. This matter then ends up on the beach.

Seagrass wrack plays an important part in the nutrient cycle, says Dr Winburg, and also acts as long-term storage for carbon in the sediments. As the seagrasses break down, they return nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus and also minerals into those organisms that live in the sand. Small fish that lay eggs in the protected intertidal zone rely on that nutrient source also for sustenance.

Smell is generated when the wrack is so thick that oxygen cannot aerate the heap. Hydrogen sulphide gas, or rotten egg gas, is generated. The gas is a completely natural consequence of anaerobic breakdown, says Dr Winburg but can be toxic in very high concentrations. Where seagrass is piled thickly on the beach, there would be little damage done to remove at least a portion of it, notes Dr Winburg. Dr Winburg cautions that the small fish and invertebrates which rely on dead seagrass are at the bottom of the food chain and harm to those links in the chain ultimately would affect fisheries in Geographe Bay.

Full story: <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2015/05/20/4239159.htm>

Related article:

<http://www.watoday.com.au/wa-news/aigle-chief-tony-poli-splashes-135m-to-get-port-geographe-up-and-running-20150506-ggvd0n.html>

## **South China Sea: Turning Reefs Into Artificial Islands?**

01 May 2015, By Youna Lyons and Wong Hiu Fung, *Eurasia Review*

China's ongoing reclamation activities in the South China Sea are a cause for environmental concern, given their potential to destroy the little-explored pristine coral reefs of the Spratlys. This development comes as a surprise coming at a time of loss of biological diversity on land and in the sea, and an acute concern for the degradation of the natural environment.

These marine features lie in contested waters. High resolution commercial satellite imagery shows mechanical dredgers and their circular trails operating on reefs in the Spratlys where substantial land reclamation work is being or has been undertaken by China. This is particularly visible on Fiery Cross Reef, Hughes Reef, Mischief Reef, Subi Reef, Cuarteron Reef, Gaven Reef and Johnson South Reef. Even unoccupied shallow features have been dredged to provide building material for nearby reclamations. Coral reefs that have been left untouched for centuries by virtue of their isolation are now gone.

Dredgers, such as cutter suction dredgers, are used to break up and remove hard substrates like coral reefs together with other attached organisms (molluscs, seagrass, etc) before compacting them onto the area being reclaimed. In addition to removing all coral reefs, these dredgers create sediment plumes that further threaten living coral fragments still alive and other photosynthetic organisms that need sunlight to live. The environmental impact due to past construction of military installations and destructive fishing methods on reefs has already been reported since the late 1980s. But such activities were of a smaller magnitude and did not involve the destruction of entire reef systems –as is being done now in the disputed waters of the South China Sea.

Full story: <http://www.eurasiareview.com/01052015-south-china-sea-turning-reefs-into-artificial-islands-analysis/>

## CONFERENCES

### **52nd Australian Marine Science Association Conference (AMSA 2015), Estuaries to Oceans (Geelong, July 5-9 2015)**

From the upper reaches of urban estuaries to the remote seas of the Southern ocean, marine science enables us to understand, conserve and sustainably manage our marine world. The focus of the 2015 AMSA conference, “Estuaries to Oceans” encompasses the importance of transitions, boundaries and connectivity in the dynamics of marine systems. ‘There are some exciting changes to the format of this year’s conference with the introduction of E-poster talks and a more focused approach to themes and symposia. See the program overview and presentations sections for more details.

The conference will be held on the shores of Port Phillip Bay, at Deakin University’s Waterfront campus in the central business district of Geelong. Originally built as woolstores in 1893, the buildings have been extensively renovated to create a modern and impressive campus centre. Geelong is Victoria’s largest regional city and is the gateway to the Great Ocean Road, beautiful surf beaches and an amazing wine region.’

#### THEMES:

- Applications of Integrated Model-observing Systems
- Behaviour, Movement and Tracking of Marine Megafauna
- Estuarine and Coastal Biogeochemistry
- Estuarine Ecosystems
- Marine biogeography: origins, connectivity and macro-ecology of the austral biota
- Marine Contamination
- Mathematical Modelling of Marine Systems and Beyond
- New Approaches to Marine Production
- Non-indigenous and Invasive species: what have we learned?
- Population Connectivity: the ecology of larval dispersal and movement in marine environments
- Using Monitoring to Map the Marine World
- Valuing Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services
- Marine and coastal ecosystems play a fundamental role in providing a wide range of benefits to sustainable human wellbeing, to the Open Theme (for contributions that do not fit named themes)

#### SYMPOSIA:

- Are Marine Sanctuary Zones in Australia Adequate?
- Marine Wastewater Outfalls in the 21st Century: still a solution or just dilution
- Monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the health of Australia’s marine environment: innovative ideas to progress current approaches
- Marine habitat repair and restoration

#### Workshops

Sunday 5th July 2015, 0900 – 1630

Workshop 1 – Introduction to R for Ecologists

Workshop 2 – Introduction to Generalised Linear Modeling

Workshop 3 – Seagrass Research

Workshop 4 – AMSA Early Career Researchers Workshop – Ocean Careers: Growing your Professional Footprint

for more information, visit <http://www.amsaconference.net/>

### **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*

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>

## GALLERY

**Urangan (QLD, Australia): 03 May 2015** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

**Moreton Bay (QLD, Australia): 24 & 25 April 2015** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Wynnum: 24 April 2015

Wellington Point: 25 April 2015

**Porthdinlleon, Llyn Peninsula (Wales) :18 April 2015** <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

## 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 37,570 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 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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