Seagrass...

The meadows of the sea

Seagrasses are unique flowering plants living immersed in salt water. Central to the coastal web of life, they help stabilise sand and mud banks and keep water clear.

Not just another seaweed!

… And not a true grass — its closest relatives are lilies and orchids. Seagrasses need sunlight, clear water and nutrients to grow — often relying on nutrients from nearby mangroves. Usually found in shallow waters, seagrasses have been found at depths of 68 metres!

A stabilizing force …

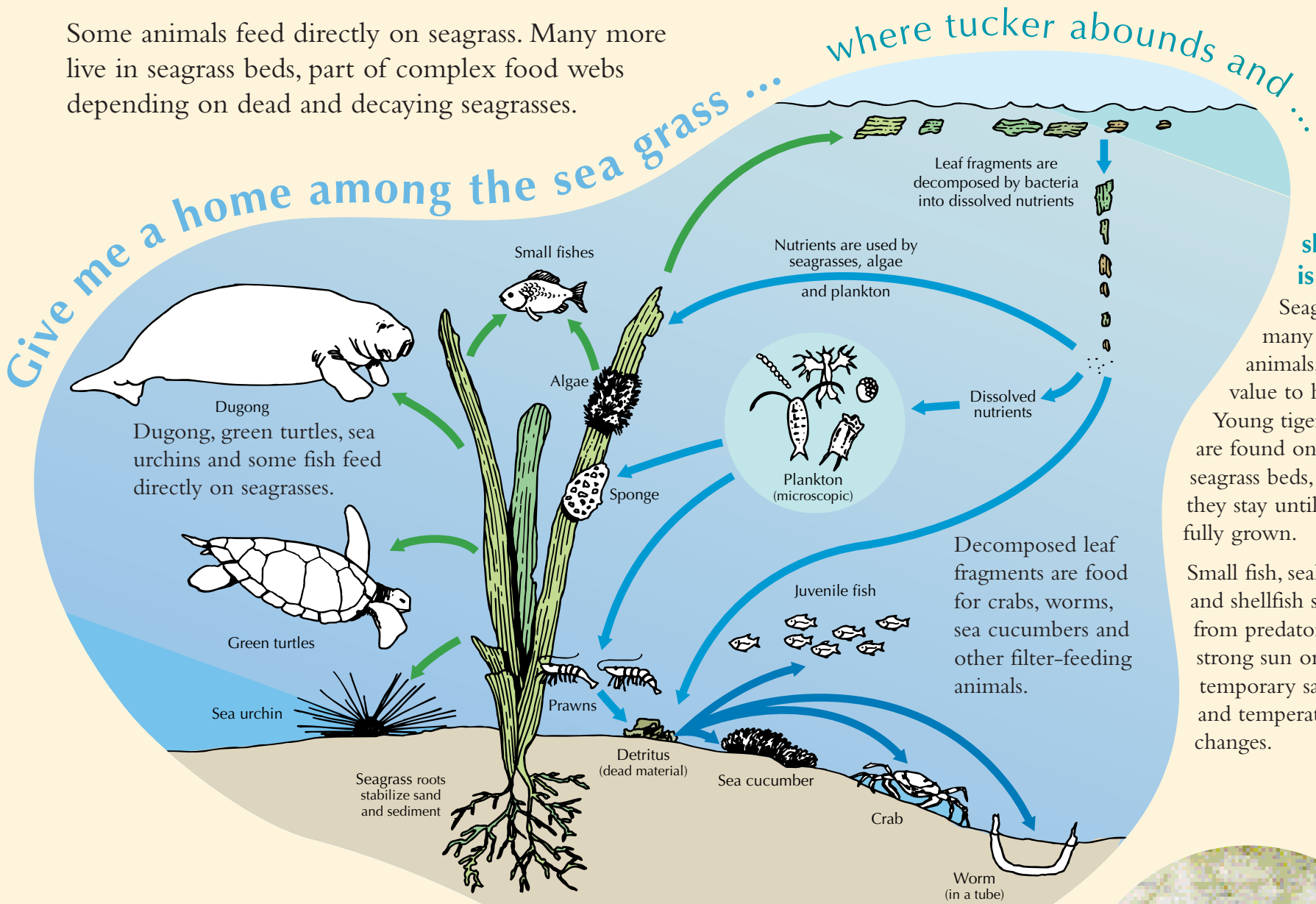
Seagrass leaves help settle sediments by slowing water flow. Roots and horizontal stems (or rhizomes) further stabilise sand, reducing movement of sediments during storms.

but slow to recover ...

Seagrasses recovery after disturbance is mainly due to the slow growth and branching of their rhizomes.

Central to a web of life.

Some animals feed directly on seagrass. Many more live in seagrass beds, part of complex food webs depending on dead and decaying seagrasses.



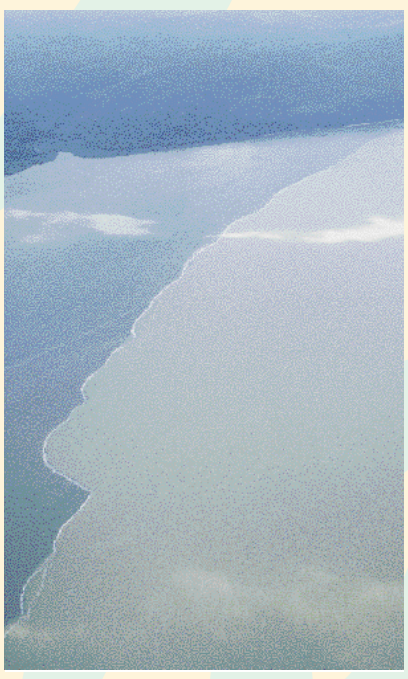
shelter is around

Seagrass protects many marine animals, some of value to humans. Young tiger prawns are found only in seagrass beds, where they stay until fully grown.

Small fish, seahorses and shellfish shelter from predators, strong sun or temporary salinity and temperature changes.

Great Sandy seagrass a precious resource ...

supporting valuable seafood species and threatened species such as dugong. After floods in 1992, many dugong died or moved away as their food was destroyed by pollutants and suspended sediments.



This sediment plume moved over 20kms from the Mary River mouth in the 1999 flood.

People can tip the balance …

- High nutrient levels from urban areas promote algae growth on seagrass leaves (above), blocking essential sunlight.
- Altered catchments increase the flow of fresh water, sediments and pollutants.
- Dredging, boat propellers, anchors, trawl nets, removal of mangroves and land reclamation all affect seagrasses.

What can you do?

- Join your local catchment group and learn more about your area.
- Be careful of what you put down stormwater drains.
- When boating, go slow around shallow seagrass beds — they are easily damaged and so too are the creatures living in them!