



Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

22 October 2008

Seagrass-Watch's electronic news service, providing marine and coastal news of international and national interest. Abbreviated articles are presented with links to their source. Seagrass-Watch HQ recommends that readers exercise their own skill and care with respect to their use of the information in this bulletin and that readers carefully evaluate the accuracy, currency, completeness and relevance of the material in the bulletin for their purposes. Seagrass-Watch welcomes feedback on the bulletins, and you are free to distribute it amongst your own networks.

Happy Birthday Seagrass-Watch!

March 2008 marked Seagrass-Watch's 10th year. On behalf of Seagrass-Watch HQ we would like to say thank you for your support.

IN THIS BULLETIN

NEWS	2
Bay waters go 16% green: critics demand more, and less (Brisbane, Australia)	2
Qld farmers may face new rules on Reef (Queensland, Australia)	2
Fla. Group Begins To Restore Damaged Seagrass Beds.....	2
Brisbane River overall health hasn't improved (Brisbane, Australia).....	3
Seagrasses killed by chemical (St. Petersburg, FL, USA)	3
Concerns about lake from 1970 (Australia).....	3
China funds protection of endangered sea cows (Xinhua , China)	3
How much is lagoon worth? \$3.7 billion (Melbourne, FL, USA)	4
Ruskin videographer angles for YouTube eyeballs (St. Petersburg,FL,USA)	4
Pressure for marina (Albany, Australia)	4
Scientists keep plugging away to keep seagrass cropping up in Bay (Seven Valleys, PA, USA).....	4
Cooperative approach to Inman River's future (Victor Harbor, South Australia, Australia)	5
Success for seabed mapping trials in Sussex and Devon (Edinburgh, UK).....	5
Resort puts visitors in touch with ecology (Persekutuan, Malaysia).....	5
Estuary monitoring agreement benefits Florida Keys waterways (Madrid,Madrid,Spain)	5
SEAGRASS-WATCH WORKSHOPS.....	6
Pacific.....	6
GALLERY	6
Singapore: 17 - 18 October 2008	6
Far North Qld (Australia): 12 - 13 October 2008	6
Hydeaway Bay, Whitsunday (Qld, Australia): 12 October 2008	6
Shoalwater Bay (Qld, Australia): 28 - 29 September 2008	6
Whitsundays (Qld, Australia): 27 - 28 September 2008	6
Shelly Beach, Townsville (Qld, Australia): 28 September 2008	6
Mission Beach (Qld, Australia): 24 - 26 September 2008	6
Townsville (Qld, Australia): 23 - 26 September 2008	6
FROM HQ.....	6
Frequently Asked Questions	6
Seagrass-Watch News Issue 34	6
Seagrass-Watch Shop	6
Virtual Herbarium	6
Giveaways.....	6
Future sampling dates.....	6
Handy Seagrass Links	6

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

Bay waters go 16% green: critics demand more, and less (Brisbane, Australia)

19 October 2008, Brisbane Times

The Bligh government has unveiled "no-fishing" green zone areas across 16 per cent of Moreton Bay Marine Park, drawing criticism from both conservationists and the commercial fishing industry. The Marine National Park zone "green areas", which stretch 125 kilometres from Caloundra to the Gold Coast Seaway, will be off-limits to both recreational and commercial fishermen from March 1 next year.

A further seven per cent of Moreton Bay has also been ruled off-limits to commercial trawlers, under conservation park zones. "We need to get serious about looking after this very precious ecosystem and this massive boost to protection will do just that," Ms Bligh said. "Moreton Bay is at risk of being loved to death.

"We want to make sure that by protecting the sensitive breeding grounds and habitat areas of the sea life of this precious environment that it will be there for the future." Ms Bligh said the rezoning would protect 20 per cent of sensitive seagrass beds, which she dubbed the "nurseries" of the Moreton Bay marine life.

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

Qld farmers may face new rules on Reef (Queensland, Australia)

08 October 2008, The Age

Farmers may face tougher regulations after a report found agricultural run-off was killing the Great Barrier Reef, with some sections already irreversibly damaged. According to the report, 6.6 million tonnes of sediment had been discharged into the reef - four times higher than estimated pre-European settlement levels. Despite financial incentives for farmers to improve land management, 16,600 tonnes of nitrogen and 4,180 tonnes of phosphorous was flushed into the reef. Queensland Premier Anna Bligh said the state government had spent \$25 million a year to protect the reef since a joint state and federal Reef Water Quality Action Plan was launched in 2003.

Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett said, in response to the Queensland government report, said the federal government was aware of the significant issues facing the Great Barrier Reef. Australians could have confidence that the federal government was getting on with the job of looking after the reef and making sure its natural and economic value was protected, he said. "We have specifically committed \$200 million to reef rescue, knowing that we need to provide additional resources, additional investment and additional effort to safeguard (the reef)," Mr Garrett said.

Queensland Farmers Federation chief executive officer John Cherry said there had been a 20 per cent cut in use of fertilisers in the past five years, which had a significant impact on the health of the reef. "I will be speaking at the summit and the points I will be saying is that the state government has to put money where its mouth is and invest in incentives for farmers to improve their practices," Mr Cherry said. "It has to be there in terms of its monitoring ... so the best information is coming back to farmers and what impact it's having on the reef. "At the end of the day, they've got to realise that they have to deliver a win-win outcome for farm productivity as well as sustainability."

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

Fla. Group Begins To Restore Damaged Seagrass Beds (Fla, USA)

07 October 2008, nbc6

A program to restore 4,000 square feet of damaged seagrass beds in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary near the Seven Mile Bridge began on Tuesday.

Most shallow-water seagrass damage is caused unintentionally by power boaters who stray outside of navigable channels and plow through shallows leaving trenches and ravaging seagrass, said Dave Score, the sanctuary's superintendent.

To repair prop scars, divers placed sediment tubes made of biodegradable cotton and filled with sand and organic material in the scar. The tube quickly disintegrates, releasing calcium carbonate responsible for grass re-growth and a healthy floor bottom. After the sediment tubes are in place, it takes 18 to 24 months for complete grass re-growth, according to Jeff Beggins, president of Seagrass Recovery that is working with The Ocean Foundation, the project's funding source.

Beggins said seagrass plays an important part in the overall health of the nation's coastlines, helping address climate change. "People like sitting here (in the Keys), having their conch fritters, watching the fish," said Beggins. "It's all interdependent on the seagrass habitat. "As those go away, you'll see a depleting fishery, fish counts and it all comes down to the state of the overall economy," he said. The Ocean Foundation, which is funding the program from corporate and private contributions, plans additional seagrass restoration efforts in other parts of Florida, New York, California and Washington State.

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

Related articles: <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/florida/AP/story/716823.html> , <http://www.nbc6.net/news/17645985/detail.html> , <http://cbs4.com/boating/seagrass.marathon.restoration.2.834428.html>

Brisbane River overall health hasn't improved (Brisbane, Australia)

22 October 2008, Ursula Heger of mX

The Brisbane River's overall health hasn't improved over the past year, with the river's lower stretches still polluted with chemicals and waste. A report card on the health of the southeast's waterways released today shows that while nitrogen and phosphorus levels in the River upstream of the Wivenhoe Dam continued to improve from last year, some freshwater streams in the lower river catchment could barely sustain marine life. The report found a significant improvement in the health of most estuaries in southeast Queensland, due to improvement of pollution levels from waste water treatment plants.

Moreton Bay also improved slightly since last year, with Waterloo Bay and the Eastern Bay areas increasing phytoplankton and seagrass. However Central Bay and Deception Bay both rated poorly, scoring a C and a D respectively.

Health Waterways Panel chairman Paul Greenfield said the increasing population and climate change were big threats to the health of the southeast's waterways, and called for action. Queensland's Minister for Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation Andrew McNamara defended the bay's marine rating, saying the health of the bay has suffered over the past year because of several large floods in Logan.

Full story and source: <http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,24535421-952,00.html>

Seagrasses killed by chemical (St. Petersburg, FL, USA)

21 October 2008, Tampabay.com

ST. PETERSBURG — A company drilling a natural gas pipeline route under Tampa Bay this summer spilled a chemical [bentonite] that has killed about 2 acres of seagrass, according to the state Department of Environmental Protection.

The spill by Gulfstream Pipeline killed seagrass beds about 1,500 feet due east of the Progress Energy power plant on Weedon Island, DEP spokeswoman Pamala Vazquez said. Investigators have snorkeled through that area of the bay several times, including last week, trying to chart the extent of the die-off and figure out how to make up for it.

Earlier this month, the company finished removing the chemical that leaked, said Gulfstream spokesman Christopher Stockton. The company's experts say the seagrass die-off may not be as extensive as the DEP fears.

Once the DEP knows how extensive the damage is, Ms Vazquez said, "there will have to be corrective action taken by Gulfstream." That could include planting new seagrass to replace what was killed, she said.

Full story and source: <http://www.tampabay.com/news/environment/wetlands/article863882.ece>

Related links: <http://www.bradenton.com/business/story/972031.html>

[Readers should note that the death of the seagrass is not quantified and the incident is still under investigation]

Concerns about lake from 1970 (Australia)

16 October 2008, Central Coast Sun Weekly

A report by CSIRO marine laboratories scientist Andrew D Kennedy said that concern about the Tuggerah Lakes environment was first noted in 1970 when accumulations of black mud appeared on previously clean, sandy beaches. Another later study by CSIRO scientist Anthony Scott pointed to the limited water interchange between the lakes and the sea "and hence tides in the main body of the lakes are negligible," he said. His scientific paper also said the operation of the Munmorah Power Station from the late 1960s onwards increased the water temperature and changed water circulation patterns in the two northern lakes.

Substantial changes in seagrass beds have been noted in the lakes, the report said. Residents interviewed at the time said the pollution in the lake can't escape because there is very little flushing of the lakes system.

Full story and source: <http://www.sunweekly.com.au/news/local/news/environment/concerns-about-lake-from-1970/1333306.aspx>

Tuggerah Lakes background: <http://www.dnr.nsw.gov.au/estuaries/inventory/tuggerah.shtml>

China funds protection of endangered sea cows (Xinhua, China)

13 October 2008, www.chinaview.cn

NANNING, Oct. 13 (Xinhua) -- A protection project for dugongs, an endangered sea mammal, is expected help save the species from extinction in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

The project will cost 26 million yuan (3.8 million U.S. dollars), 76 percent of which comes from the central budget and the rest from the regional and local governments, Lai Chunmiao, the Beihai Environment Monitoring Center director, told Xinhua on Monday.

The project, to be completed in 2009, includes the building of a scientific research center, a sea animal rescue center, watchtowers and the purchase of equipment, such as patrol boats, in the Hepu Dugong National Nature Reserve, the only sanctuary of its kind in the country for the animal.

Full story and source: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-10/13/content_10188528.htm

How much is lagoon worth? \$3.7 billion (Melbourne, FL, USA)

13 October 2008, Florida Today

The one-year, \$112,000 effort examined benefits of the 156-mile-long estuary that spans Volusia, Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie and Martin counties. Officials hope to use the new figures for the estuary to leverage future government money for more projects to restore its habitats -- and preserve it as economic driver.

Specifically, the study said activities dependent on the lagoon generated \$630 million in income to local residents in the five counties, \$112 million in state and local tax revenues, and 15,000 full- and part-time jobs. The total economic value in Brevard topped \$1.2 billion, including about \$100 million in income to residents and 3,112 full- and part-time jobs.

An acre of seagrass -- the main money machine when it comes to supporting fish, crabs and other lagoon life -- is worth about \$4,600 per year in the recreational and commercial fishing it supports, the study says.

Full story and source: <http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20081013/BUSINESS/810130310/1006/news01>

Ruskin videographer angles for YouTube eyeballs (St. Petersburg, FL, USA)

10 October 2008, Tampabay.com

Fred Jacobsen curls his toes and steadies himself on Gus Muench's crabbing boat. It's kind of like surfing, he says. But instead of balancing on a long board, he's holding his Sony video camera still. It's focused on Muench, recording his monologue on Cockroach Bay.

The lush mangrove islands, cloudy water and sea grass, marked with ribbons of scars caused by propellers, are managed by several state and regional groups. Wouldn't it make sense to join them under one advisory board? Muench asks.

"The seagrass is so important," he said. "It's the habitat for fish, crabs, shrimp. If you don't have a habitat, you don't have a home for them." Jacobsen records Muench's ideas and takes in the bay. He points his camera at a flock white ibis as the boat draws closer and they gracefully fly off their perch. He plans to preserve the morning in a short video posted on YouTube.

Full story and source: <http://www.tampabay.com/news/environment/wetlands/article844141.ece>

Pressure for marina (Albany, Australia)

09 October 2008, Albany Great Southern Weekender

A NEW around-Australia yacht race is the latest plan to put Albany on the international sailing map. The announcement of the event puts more pressure on LandCorp to fast-track completion of its Foreshore Redevelopment Project.

Contracts for the marina's construction are being assessed by LandCorp, and the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) has given approval for the development to proceed. Tenders were called in August for Stage Two civil works of the waterfront development. Submissions are being assessed to select a preferred tenderer. Site works to the eastern side of the jetty and construction of the breakwater and marina would then start.

The harbour would be protected by two breakwaters with a total footprint of 2.25ha. The marina would have 130 boat pens, including large pens for charter operators, and be built in two stages. The construction of a solid breakwater to create the protected harbour will alter the current water movement in the area and reduce the water exchange within the sheltered harbour causing direct seagrass losses. However, the loss of seagrass would be offset by replanting 0.4 ha of seagrass elsewhere in the harbour. Potential sites for seagrass rehabilitation close to the project area have already been identified.

Full story and source: <http://albany.yourguide.com.au/news/local/news/general/pressure-for-marina/1329390.aspx>

Scientists keep plugging away to keep seagrass cropping up in Bay (Seven Valleys, PA, USA)

08 October 2008, The Chesapeake Bay Journal

Standing in waist-deep, murky water, Laura Murray raked the bottom of the creek, hoping to reap the reward of several years of work. At last she found part of what she was looking for, some sprigs of sago pondweed. But there was no trace whatsoever of the redhead grass that she and colleagues from the Maryland Center for Environmental Science's Horn Point Laboratory had planted in Irish Creek.

A bed of widgeon grass already existed in the creek, located near the mouth of the Choptank River, but had shrunk dramatically in recent years. By bolstering it with new species, the scientists hoped to stabilize, and eventually grow, the grass bed. It was one of the final projects supported through a multi-year research program aimed at finding ways to accelerate large-scale underwater grass restoration efforts.

Efforts to plant underwater grasses in the Bay date to 1983, but in the 21 years prior to the research project, just 189 acres were planted—a rate of nine acres a year. Most of those projects involved transplanting grasses from healthy beds to barren areas by hand, a labor-intensive job which often pushed restoration costs into the tens of thousands of dollars per acre. And, more than 90 percent of those projects failed within three years.

The hope was to find an "agricultural approach" to underwater grass restoration. Instead of hand planting individual plants, most of the research was focused on finding ways to jump-start beds of eelgrass, a critical species in high-salinity areas, by using seeds.

The Bay today has only about a third of the 185,000 acres of grass beds that scientists say it should support. While water quality is the main impediment to recovery, improved restoration techniques are needed to establish beds in barren areas where natural expansion is unlikely.

Full story and source: <http://www.bayjournal.com/article.cfm?article=3418>

Cooperative approach to Inman River's future (Victor Harbor, South Australia, Australia)

30 September 2008, Victor Harbor Times

VICTOR HARBOR - The Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) and City of Victor Harbor are working together to develop a solution to seagrass problems at the mouth of the Inman River. Dr Murray Townsend from DEH's Coastal Management Branch said the council had agreed to block the mouth with sand during summer, to prevent seagrass from being pushed into the channel. The council would then open the channel mechanically in autumn, when flows increase, to allow the river to flow out to sea.

"If decomposing seagrass accumulates in the lower reaches of the river, it can drive dissolved oxygen to very low levels," Dr Townsend said. "This was believed to be the cause of the recent fish kill in the Inman River. The decomposing seagrass can also be very unpleasant, in terms of odour, for local residents and visitors to the caravan park." Dr Townsend said the seagrass is able to enter the river whenever there is a drop in outflow at the mouth.

Full story and source: <http://victorharbor.yourguide.com.au/news/local/news/general/cooperative-approach-to-inman-rivers-future/1321242.aspx>

Success for seabed mapping trials in Sussex and Devon (Edinburgh, UK)

29 September 2008, Fish Update

A lack of high quality seabed habitat information has always constrained capture fisheries and shellfish farmers in their endeavour to manage fishing grounds and reduce the environmental impact of fishing, as well as comply with marine nature conservation legislation.

To help industry map marine habitats and species in a given area, Seafish has been trialling its 'Basic Seabed Habitat Mapping' system with fishers in Sussex and Devon. Under this system, basic information on the type and location of the habitat and the location of important species is collected, supported by a photographic or video record and a sketch map of the site.

The seabed mapping trial formed the basis of an extensive survey of Devon's Salcombe Estuary during September. Local fishermen Kevin Oakman (MFV Pimpernell II) and Matthew Yeoman (MPV Ann) worked with Devon SFC and the crew of patrol vessel FPV Drumbeat to map sensitive seagrass beds adjacent to their traditional fishing grounds.

The estuary contains a variety of seabed habitats, including the dense areas of eel grass which are important settlement and nursery grounds for juvenile scallops. These beds are vulnerable to mobile gear such as the scallop dredges traditionally employed over the winter.

Full story and source:

http://www.fishupdate.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/11797/Success_for_seabed_mapping_trials_in_Sussex_and_Devon.html

Resort puts visitors in touch with ecology (Persekutuan, Malaysia)

29 September 2008, New Straits Times

KOTA KINABALU: Responding to the growing threat to marine life, and the push for businesses to be more environment-friendly, an island resort has set up a research centre and a programme to rehabilitate corals and fish injured by trawler nets. The Marine Ecology Research Centre (MERC) at the Gayana Eco Resort also teaches its guests about the island's ecosystems and the need to conserve them. This is part of the Sabah Development Corridor (SDC) blueprint, as the state moves to boost its economy through tourism.

MERC director Alvin Wong said the centre had also built tanks replicating the mangroves and seagrass beds around the island to teach visitors about its ecosystem. "We want our visitors to see the massive root systems of the mangroves which protect the coast from erosion and storms, and provide an environment for many commercially important species of fish. "Seagrass beds are another ecosystem we want to teach people about. "Important species such as dugong and sea horses feed on seagrass."

Full story and source: http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/NST/Monday/National/2362570/Article/index_html

Estuary monitoring agreement benefits Florida Keys waterways (Madrid, Madrid, Spain)

24 September 2008, Environmental Expert (press release)

The South Florida Water Management District entered into a five-year cooperative agreement with Miami-Dade County to continue support for long-term environmental monitoring in northeastern Florida Bay, Manatee Bay and

Barnes Sound. The monitoring effort documents how changes in estuary water quality impact seagrass growth off the south Florida coast.

'Our water bodies at the southern end of Florida's peninsula are valuable indicators of water quality improvements upstream,' said Michael Collins, SFWMD Governing Board member and resident of the Florida Keys. 'Monitoring provides an important tool for achieving healthier ecosystems here in the Keys and throughout the region.'

The monitoring program, known as the South Florida Estuarine Submerged Aquatic Vegetation and Water Quality Monitoring Network, is conducted by Miami-Dade's Department of Environmental Resources Management (DERM). DERM scientists collect water samples from 12 basins in the study area and analyze them for a variety of chemical, physical and biological features.

Full story and source: <http://www.environmental-expert.com/resultEachPressRelease.aspx?cid=25702&codi=37659&idproducttype=8&level=0>

SEAGRASS-WATCH WORKSHOPS

Pacific

Papua new Guinea, Motupore Island, 24–27 October 2008

Location: Motupore Island Research Centre, Bootless Inlet, Port Moresby

Participants: University of Papua New Guinea

Sponsors: UPNG, MIRC, David & Lucile Packard Foundation and Seagrass-Watch HQ

For more information: <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/training.html#wkshop08>

GALLERY

Singapore: 17 - 18 October 2008 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Far North Qld (Australia): 12 - 13 October 2008 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Hydeaway Bay, Whitsunday (Qld, Australia): 12 October 2008

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Townsville (Qld, Australia): 23 - 26 September 2008 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

FROM HQ

Frequently Asked Questions <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/faq.html>

Seagrass-Watch News Issue 34 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/newsletters.html>

Seagrass-Watch Shop <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/shop.html>

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

Giveaways <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/shop.html#GIVE1>

- Seagrasses of Australia
- Phytoplankton Guide
- Bookmarks
- Stickers
- Seagrass-Watch Newsletter 28, 31, 32, 33, 34 (hardcopy)

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.