



Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

31 August 2011

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NEWS

How the world benefits from protecting seagrass (Wales, UK)

29 August 2011, by Dr Leanne Cullen-Unsworth, WalesOnline

Health Wales is highlighting the work of Welsh Crucible researchers – the cream of Welsh research talent. Dr Leanne Cullen-Unsworth explains the vital role seagrass plays in sustaining our food supply. "I have always been interested

in people and places and have a natural curiosity about the way different systems in the world around us are linked together. I'm particularly interested in looking at the threats to our lifestyles arising from a changing global environment. I've worked closely with communities around the world to integrate both science and local knowledge, using it to develop sustainable solutions to problems like how to co-operatively manage our valuable natural resources now and in the future."

Our ecological knowledge about seagrass is limited, and marine conservation priorities often do not recognise the value of the goods and services they provide us with.

There is a real need here for more research to be done, as protecting seagrasses will have numerous benefits, including helping to protect biodiversity, ecosystem structure, fisheries support function, food security, climate regulation through carbon sequestration and other essential ecosystem services.

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

Famine threatens Australia's gentle sea cows (QLD, Australia)

28 August 2011, by Roger Maynard, The Independent

Extreme weather has destroyed the dugong's feeding grounds – just the latest menace facing this already endangered species. An underwater famine is posing the latest threat to one of Australia's most endangered marine species, the dugong, which lives entirely on seagrass. At least 100 have starved to death in recent months and many more are likely to follow in the absence of their only food source.

Known as sea cows because of their total dependency on seagrass, numbers have plummeted over the past decade as they struggle to cope with extreme weather conditions, escalating industrial activity, and hunting by indigenous fishermen. Turtles, too, have fallen victim to the seagrass famine with several hundred reported washed up dead along the coastline. "This is a national environmental disaster," says Professor Ellen Ariel, a marine biologist at James Cook University in Townsville. "What's happening now is they have nothing to eat and it's not going to change in any way soon. Seagrass takes between two to three years to recover, if there are no other extreme weather events in the meantime."

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is similarly concerned, recently launching a campaign to protect dugong and green turtles which it predicts will die in record numbers. Forced to stray from their regular foraging areas in search of food, the two species are much more vulnerable to disease, injury and death.

The dugong's placid nature and slow swimming style make it easy prey for predators. Spending their entire life at sea, they swim by moving their broad spade-like tail in an up and down motion and by the use of their two flippers. The large grey mammals which are up to 10ft long, can live for decades but take time to reach sexual maturity and do not breed rapidly. Without the sea grass they will simply starve to death.

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

\$500 for shakin' it for dugongs (QLD, Australia)

25 August 2011, by Hannah Busch, Fraser Coast Chronicle

Hervey Bay dance group Nefertiti Dance will accept a \$500 award today for their entry in the Shakin' It for the Dugongs dance competition earlier this year. The brain child of educator and catchment specialist Peter Oliver, the Shakin' it for the Dugongs competition was an experiment in using the internet to generate awareness about the need to protect dugongs in the Great Sandy Strait.

Nefertiti Dance gained more than 900 views on video-sharing website YouTube for their entry to the competition. Entrants were required to choreograph a dance to Mr Oliver's song Dugong Rock. Videos with the most views and originality were declared the winners in June.

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

Port Geographe harbour entrance hazard (WA, Australia)

24 August 2011, Busselton Dunsborough Mail

The Department of Transport has issued a warning about a potential navigational hazard in the harbour entrance channel at Port Geographe. DoT said seagrass wrack had accumulated, making the channel entrance significantly shallower in some areas. It said the affected area included the full extent of the entrance channel as defined by the rock breakwaters.

There was a moving seagrass wrack layer in the area, which may vary significantly in thickness and position over a short timeframe. DoT project manager James Holder told the Mail that the department had conducted a hydrographic survey at Port Geographe almost two weeks ago to determine the annual requirements for coastal maintenance.

"This survey revealed shoaling caused by seagrass wrack in one section of Port Geographe entrance channel, reducing the navigable depth," he said. "From experience we know this situation can change quickly and larger tides can move the material out of the channel.

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

Shark Bay seagrass 'potentially an \$8 billion carbon sink' (WA, Australia)

22 August 2011, The University of Western Australia

Shark Bay's extensive seagrass meadows act as a massive carbon sink which stores more than eight billion dollars' worth of carbon dioxide if valued according to the Federal Government's proposed carbon price. That's the figure calculated by researcher Professor Jim Fourqurean who is part of a new global initiative aimed at utilising seagrass meadows to help mitigate climate change.

Professor Fourqurean has been researching the seagrasses of Shark Bay - a World Heritage area - as part of his work with The University of Western Australia's Oceans Institute, where he has been the Gledden Visiting Fellow. Professor Fourqurean has calculated the amount of carbon dioxide stored in the seagrass meadows, as part of work involving his Oceans Institute colleagues Winthrop Professor Gary Kendrick and Emeritus Professor Di Walker who are undertaking a Caring for Our Country project funded by the Australian Government.

Professor Fourqurean is involved in the Blue Carbon initiative, along with UWA Oceans Institute Director Professor Carlos Duarte. The initiative is a relatively new international scientific body aiming to preserve seagrass habitats as a climate mitigation strategy. Part of the work is exploring the monetary value of the carbon in seagrass meadows as part of a possible offset scheme.

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

Great Barrier Reef: Rising turtle deaths prompt warnings of wildlife crisis (QLD, Australia)

18 August 2011, by Oliver Milman, The Guardian

Researchers believe cyclones and flooding earlier in the year have wiped out the seagrass beds on which the turtles feed. Unusually large numbers of dead and dying sea turtles are washing up on Australia's Great Barrier Reef coast, prompting environmental groups to warn of a wildlife crisis in the region.

Researchers and local residents have reported that several Queensland beaches have been strewn with the carcasses of the animals, with wildlife centres in the northern city of Townsville inundated with ailing turtles. According to the Queensland state government, 649 turtle deaths were reported in the first seven months of 2011, up 200 on the same period last year. Dugongs are also suffering badly, with 96 of the aquatic mammals reported dead in the first seven months of the year, compared with 79 in the whole of 2010.

Fred Nucifora, director of Reef HQ Aquarium, told the Sydney Morning Herald that the centre's turtle hospital is running at full capacity, with 15 turtles now being cared for. Queensland's recent natural disasters have heaped further pressure on turtle numbers, which face numerous other threats.

An Australian government report released last week revealed that agricultural pesticides released by farmers have swept across the Great Barrier Reef, causing damage to coral and wildlife. Endangered species such as the leatherback turtle and green turtle have also seen their numbers dwindle due to fishing nets and boat strikes.

WWF has urged the Queensland government to overhaul regulations surrounding fisheries and coastal development, as well as reduce the amount of pollution released into the sea. Vicky Darling, Queensland's environment minister, said that a panel of marine scientists will explore the causes of the turtle deaths and draw up recommendations to combat the problem.

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

Young Leader Honoured (QLD, Australia)

15 August 2011, Natural Matters (Gympie, QLD, Australia) edition 27

The region's leaders in natural resource management gathered at the Gympie Conference Centre as part of the Burnett Mary Regional Group's 2011 Showcase. Gympie Region Mayor Ron Dyne welcomed delegates to Gympie, joining BMRG chair Dr Evelyn Meier in opening the conference.

BMRG general manager Danny Green highlighted the year's achievements in conservation with programs, including Paddock to Reef - a research program aimed at measuring run-off from cane and horticultural crops run in collaboration with the Department of Economic, Employment and Innovation.

A high number of quality nominations were received for the Showcase Awards which recognised achievements in a range of categories. The high number made the job of choosing the finalists particularly hard and demonstrated just how much work people have done to address natural resource management issues throughout the region.

The winner of the Young Leaders Award was Amy Thompson. After meeting Gordon Cottle (Seagrass-Watch Local Coordinator for the Great Sandy Strait Flora and Fauna Watch) at Norman Point, Amy became an enthusiastic Seagrass-Watch volunteer in the Great Sandy Strait. Under Gordon's mentoring and support, Amy has become an avid leader and is hoping to realise her dream via James Cook University.

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

Pesticides hurting Great Barrier Reef: report (QLD, Australia)

15 August 2011, by Timothy McDonald, ABC online

The Queensland and Federal Government's first report card on water quality in the Great Barrier Reef has found pesticides used in agriculture are causing significant problems for the reef. The report says some farmers need to be more careful with their chemicals, finding that nearly one-quarter of horticulture producers and 12 per cent of graziers are using practices considered unacceptable by industry and the community. In the case of the sugar cane industry, roughly one-third face the same criticism.

Nick Heath from the World Wildlife Fund Australia says the sugar cane industry in the wet tropics had a 72 per cent rate of "unacceptable practice". Mr Heath says the report shows government needs to further limit the use of chemicals, and he has called for a ban on the weed killer Diuron. "Pesticides have been found at toxic concentrations up to 60 kilometres inside the World Heritage area and at concentrations known to harm coral," he said. "And you may be aware that there's a big die-off in turtle and dugong numbers at the moment as a result of the floods. Those floods are carrying these pollutants and they're basically destroying the seagrass beds of Queensland." But the sugar cane industry's peak body, Canegrowers, says the data reflects practices of a few years ago, and says there has been significant change since then.

The report says the Great Barrier Reef is in moderate condition overall. Mr Burke says the use of chemicals has become much more precise and environmentally friendly in the past few years, but said some of those improvements may be undermined by Cyclone Yasi

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

Gladstone turtle deaths blamed on extreme wet season (QLD, Australia)

12 August 2011, Megan Hendry, ABC Online

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) says the extreme summer wet season is to blame for the number of turtles washing up on beaches in the Capricorn Coast region. There have been seven stranded turtles reported on the Capricorn Coast over the past week and 68 in the Gladstone region in central Queensland since the start of the year.

QPWS marine regional manager Damien Head says an increase in turbidity and nutrient run-off is causing problems for turtles and dugongs right along the Queensland coast. "It's caused a decline in the seagrass beds which is a major food source for dugong and turtles," he said.

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

Our home is girt by sea; our land abounds in nature's carbon sinks (NSW, Australia)

12 August 2011, Peter Macreadie, The Conversation

Reducing carbon emissions is necessary, but what about the carbon that has already been released into the atmosphere? Many countries are turning to "biosequestration" for the answers: using nature – including plants and soil – to capture and store carbon. And Australia's greatest storage potential may be in our oceans.

As the prospects of using terrestrial systems to sequester carbon become increasingly limited, a new hope has emerged in "blue carbon". This is carbon captured by vegetated coastal habitats, particularly mangroves, seagrasses, and saltmarshes. Although these habitats only occupy about 1% of the seafloor, it is estimated that they capture and store up to 70% of the carbon in the marine realm. Australia has vastly more seagrass than any other country in the world. Along its 32,000 km coastline, Australia has around 90,000 square km of seagrass. This is enough seagrass to cover the state of Victoria.

In terms of carbon abatement value, Australia's seagrass is worth around \$AU45 billion at a price of \$AU23 per tonne. Our blue carbon resources, however, are continually under threat from human activities such as coastal development and run-off from agriculture. This can lead to direct loss or modification of their carbon sink potential. The risk here is that these habitats could switch from being carbon sinks, to being carbon sources. If their stored carbon is released, it will further acidify our oceans and contribute to the ever growing atmospheric CO2 burden. The challenge for Australia is to maintain the abatement potential of its blue carbon resources and prevent their future loss.

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

Qld disasters claim turtles and dugongs (QLD, Australia)

12 August 2011, Ninemsn

The terrible animal death toll from Queensland's summer of natural disasters is adding up, with a jump in turtle deaths stacking on top of a high number of dugong fatalities. Figures released on Friday show 649 turtle deaths were reported in the first seven months of 2011. The toll has jumped by more than 200 compared with the same period last year when 436 turtles died. It comes after figures showed 96 dugongs washed up dead on the state's coastline in the first seven months of this year, compared with 79 for the whole of 2010.

A breakdown of the figures show 90 turtles died in the Gladstone area in central Queensland, home to a major port and a growing number of ships and dredging projects for the gas export industry. There were 84 deaths in

Townsville, 57 in Moreton Bay, 14 in Hervey Bay and the remainder spread across the state. Queensland Environment Minister Vicky Darling said the majority of deaths were from malnutrition, sickness and diseases.

Like dugongs, turtles were struggling to find food because seagrass beds, their major food source, had been impacted by turbidity and low salinity following flooding in the coastal catchments, Ms Darling said on Friday. Ms Darling said the turtles were weak and as a result spent more time on the water surface where they're more vulnerable to boat strikes. The situation in Gladstone was the most concerning, she said. Former environment minister Kate Jones established a panel of marine scientists to examine the causes of deaths in Gladstone. Ms Darling said the panel's work wasn't finalised yet but a number of initial recommendations were underway such as improved reporting and turtle health checks.

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

Turtle crisis looming on reef: WWF (QLD, Australia)

09 August 2011, Sydney Morning Herald

Starving turtles and carcasses are washing up along the Queensland coast amid warning of a wildlife crisis on the Great Barrier Reef. Researchers, traditional owners and residents are reporting a spike in the number of dead, starving and sick turtles being found along the coast since last summer's floods and Cyclone Yasi. There's also been a rise in dugong deaths after the natural disasters destroyed large tracts of the seagrass the two species rely on for food.

The conservation group WWF on Tuesday called on the state government to urgently release data on turtle deaths and strandings. The government on Monday revealed 96 dugongs had been found dead in the first seven months of 2011, compared to 79 for the whole of last year. Statistics on turtle deaths are expected to be released soon. Anecdotal evidence indicates reef turtle populations are in crisis.

Girringun Aboriginal Corporation chief executive Phil Rist said traditional owners north and south of Townsville had found large numbers of dead turtles and some dugongs in recent weeks. He said fisheries officers had reported 90 per cent of seagrass beds had been lost in the Cardwell and Tully area. He said some local traditional owners were so concerned they had agreed voluntarily not to issue traditional hunting permits.

Barbara Gibbs, who lives on Magnetic Island off Townsville, says she's seen about 15 starving turtles and three dugongs since the beginning of June. She said she recently came across a group of 10 turtles, ranging from babies to fully grown adults, that had come into the shallows to die. Other island residents had reported many more dead or sick turtles and dugongs, with similar sightings in places like Pallarenda, on the mainland north of Townsville.

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

Queensland dugongs 'starving to death' (QLD, Australia)

08 August 2011, Sydney Morning Herald

More dugongs have died this year than in all of 2010 because of Queensland's summer of disasters. Ninety-six of the sea mammals washed up dead on the state's coastline in the first seven months of this year, compared with 79 for the whole of last year. Environment Minister Vicky Darling says scientists believe most of the dugongs died of starvation after Queensland's floods devastated their main food source, seagrass.

Of the 96 dugongs, six died from human-induced causes such as boat strikes. Scientists believe about 90 died from poor physical condition consistent with lack of food, Ms Darling said. In their weakened condition the animals may also be more susceptible to boat strikes and getting tangled in nets, she said.

Most deaths happened around Townsville, in the state's north, and in Moreton Bay, in the south-east. Ms Darling said she expected dugong deaths to increase this year, but scientists had told her the Queensland dugongs were not in danger of dying out. Ms Darling said the state government had already taken measures to protect marine animals. These included cracking down on pesticide run-off in the Great Barrier Reef and run-off from drains, and go-slow and no-fishing zones in Moreton Bay.

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

Oceans left out of the climate conversation (Vic, Australia)

08 August 2011, PRWire

Responses to climate change in Australia have so far overlooked the role of oceans and coasts, according to one of the international pioneers of citizen science, Brian Rosborough, Founder of Earthwatch. Coastal vegetation and oceans which account for 55% of all the carbon captured in the world should be a part of the climate change conversation.

Mr Brian Rosborough founding chairman of Earthwatch Institute is in Australia to celebrate the organisation's 40th birthday at their Oceania Gala on August 10th in Melbourne, which is being used to raise funds for oceans research. A recognised visionary on promoting scientific research to track changes in the climate for over four decades Mr Rosborough said, "community involvement with scientific research was one of the most powerful keys to progress the international climate change conversation".

Mr Rosborough said, "It was vital that scientific research into the oceans is translated into actions to protect the health of coastal vegetation and oceans. Vegetated coastal habitats provide vital ecosystem functioning and can act as large carbon sinks but they are experiencing a steep global decline, up to four times faster than rainforests. Australia has the world's most diverse array of tropical and temperate seagrasses. Australia hosts more than half of the world's 60 species and 11 of the world's 12 genera of seagrasses, with about 51,000 square kilometres of seagrass meadows, with Shark Bay in Western Australia home to the world's largest sea grass bed. "Unlike carbon capture and storage on land, where the carbon may be locked away for decades or centuries, that stored in the oceans remains for millennia" Mr Rosborough said.

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

Fish nurseries need more than mangroves, says study (QLD, Australia)

05 August 2011, Reuters AlertNet

Conserving mangroves alone may not be enough to protect local fisheries in the Caribbean, according to a study. Research in the Caribbean and Mexico had previously shown that the mangrove swamps act as vital nurseries for many tropical fish species. Now, a study conducted in Honduras reveals that seagrass beds and coral reefs also need to be conserved to boost fish populations and protect fisheries.

This is because seagrass beds act as nurseries, too, and link inland mangroves and offshore coral reefs. Juvenile fish migrate through these habitats, from nurseries to coral reefs, where they live as adults. By surveying fish in seagrass beds, mangroves and coral reefs on the islands of Utila and Cayos Cochinos, she found that daily migrations occur between mangroves and seagrass, because certain fish species feed in seagrass beds at night.

She suggests that the connectivity of seagrass, mangroves and coral reefs should be taken into consideration when implementing policy and conservation practices. Edward Barbier, an environmental and resource economist at the University of Wyoming, United States, added: "Habitats and fisheries are interrelated, and such linkages are what makes them productive and valuable. The foundation of this value is the interconnectedness of these habitats, which mirrors the life-cycle of fish. "Beyond the biological and monetary value of fisheries, if you start losing fish species, changing the biological food web and the interconnectedness between key species, you may affect the function of the whole marine environment."

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

New home for sick turtles (QLD, Australia)

04 August 2011, by Sam Davis, ABC Online

Cairns Turtle Rehabilitation Centre (CTRC) will start construction on a 25-tank turtle clinic on Fitzroy Island next week as turtle strandings continue to rise in the Far North post-Cyclone Yasi. The owners of the tourism resort have donated land previously used as a clam and prawn farm to accommodate an increasing number of sick turtles.

CTRC's 10-tank facility at Portsmith has been running at capacity almost all year and the centre's co-founder, Dr Jennie Gilbert says Cyclone Yasi wiped out many seagrass beds, leaving green turtles, in particular, with little to eat.

Mrs Gilbert says the new facilities are not only much needed and timely but will be a significant improvement as well. In June, the Department of Environment reported a 500 per cent increase in turtle strandings in North Queensland.

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

Scallop search turns up great numbers (Florida, USA)

26 August 2011, Sanibel Captiva Islander

More than 100 volunteers on 30 vessels went on an important quest in the Pine Island Sound and San Carlos Bay. As part of a resource-monitoring program, volunteers snorkeled the waters in search of the elusive bay scallop. Volunteers counted 1,027 bay scallops in Pine Island Sound during the 2011 scallop search Aug. 13 hosted by SCCF and the Lee County Sea Grant Extension program. This year's number is compared with just 335 in 2010, the inaugural scallop search in Pine Island Sound.

In the mid-1960s, large populations of the bay scallop disappeared from the Southwest Florida waters due in large part to degraded water quality, related declines in seagrass coverage and over-harvesting among other causes. Water quality and seagrasses have improved in many areas to levels that may once again support these important bivalves.

While survey data, like what was collected on Aug. 13, has demonstrated the bay scallop population may be recovering, they are not yet at sustainable levels as large fluctuations in population densities are seen from year to year. Since 1993, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has reviewed the status of the fishery after the first scallop search was conducted in Tampa Bay. Key to the long-term success of this species, according to FWC, is a stable population over several years and covering a large enough area to compensate for localized losses, such as those expected during a red tide or storm event.

Full story and source: <http://sanibel-captiva-islander.com/page/content.detail/id/517500/Scallop-search-turns-up-great-numbers.html?nav=5051>

Sarasota Bay scallop count down again (Florida, USA)

13 August 2011, Sarasota Herald-Tribune

The waters and seagrass of the Sarasota Bay are said to be at their healthiest since the 1950s, but the severe decline of the sensitive bay scallops show that trouble remains. The Sarasota Bay Watch has sent volunteers on a hunt for bay scallops for four consecutive years now, with today's search continuing a sharp drop with only a meager find of 10 filter-feeders. So to continue the bay's return to health, the group plans to drop 20 million hatchery-bred baby scallops worth \$10,000 in the Sarasota Bay this fall.

It will take years to know whether the restoration efforts will succeed — as only 1 to 5 percent are expected to survive — but the local nonprofit hopes to complete similar projects annually. Sarasota's waters were once crawling with scallops. Harsh weather changes and human impact, like widespread fertilizer use, depleted the scallop population. The low numbers made commercial and recreational harvesting of scallops illegal for more than 30 years.

Full story and source: <http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20110813/BREAKING/110819836/2055/NEWS?Title=Sarasota-Bay-scallop-count-down-again>

Dugong sightings sparks plea to boaties (QLD, Australia)

11 August 2011, ABC Online

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) says there has been an unprecedented number of dugong sightings around Mackay and the Whitsundays off the state's north coast. QPWS spokesman Damian Head says a decline in seagrass beds is forcing them to feed in unusual locations, including Shute Harbour and the islands. He says boaters need to keep an eye out for the mammals.

"The dugong are more sensitive than they would otherwise and we ask people to be vigilant while they're on the water," he said. "Keep watch, look out for both dugong and turtle and slow down, particularly when in shallow water or going over known seagrass locations, which we have a few of in the Whitsunday and Mackay areas.

Full story and source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-08-11/dugong-sightings-sparks-plea-to-boaties/2834308>

Flooding blamed for turtle tragedy (QLD, Australia)

11 August 2011, Rockhampton Morning Bulletin

Last summer's floods are the reason so many turtles are washing up on Capricorn Coast beaches, councillors were told yesterday. Senior ranger Chris Maple said large numbers of turtles were suffering starvation as a result of pollution that had decimated the seagrass beds which provide such a large part of their diet.

For months now visitors to beaches in Emu Park, Keppel Sands, Yeppoon and Farnborough, have been shocked to find dead or dying turtles. Four were discovered on Farnborough Beach as recently as Friday. Three of them were dead but a fourth was clinging to life and is being nursed by marine parks staff at Rosslyn Bay.

Mr Maple addressed members of Rockhampton Regional Council's environment committee yesterday in response to a request from councillors concerned about the scale of the tragedy. He said seagrass beds had been decimated by the dirty water that washed into the ocean during the floods which caused so much havoc in the region during January.

People were suspicious that an increase in trawling in the bay might be to blame and some suggested there should be an exclusion zone to protect turtles and dugongs. But the Department of Environment and Resource Management said commercial fishing was not to blame. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service was, however, asking boaties to slow down and look out for turtles and dugongs. Anyone who finds stranded marine animals should call the strandings hotline on 13 74 68.

Full story and source: <http://www.themorningbulletin.com.au/story/2011/08/11/flooding-blamed-for-sea-turtle-tragedy-capricorn/>

Generation of turtles at risk: researcher (QLD, Australia)

10 August 2011, Sydney Morning Herald

Juvenile turtles are dying en masse on the Great Barrier Reef and the full effects of the disaster won't be seen for 20 years, a researcher says. Three recent cyclones, and this year's floods, have wiped out seagrass beds along large swathes of the Queensland coast, leaving turtles and dugongs to starve to death.

James Cook University's Dr Ellen Ariel, a virologist who works in turtle health, said about 100 dead and dying turtles had recently been found in a single week in Queensland. She fears that in the worst-case scenario, an entire generation of green turtles could be at risk. Most of the turtles being found are juveniles about five to ten years old that will never reach sexual maturity. The full effects of that will be seen in about 20 years, when they would have reached sexual maturity and started to contribute to the population.

Dr Ariel said the situation would get worse before it got better, with seagrasses expected to take five to 10 years to fully recover, and longer if there are more cyclones. She said a research team working off Townsville five weeks ago assessed a group of 23 turtles and found only two were okay.

Dr Ariel said Queenslanders were entitled to DERM figures on turtle strandings, gathered since Cyclone Yasi and the floods hit early this year. The government on Monday revealed 96 dugongs had been found dead in the first seven months of 2011, compared to 79 for the whole of last year. No statistics have yet been released on turtle deaths and strandings.

Full story and source: <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-national/generation-of-turtles-at-risk-researcher-20110810-1ilv8.html>

GALLERY

Fiji: 24 August – 01 September 2011 http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery_Aug_11.html

Cawaci (Ovalau): 24 August 2011
Suva, Nasese (Viti Levu): 28 August 2011
Tagaqe (Viti Levu): 29 August 2011
Natadola (Viti Levu): 30 August 2011
Nadi (Viti Levu): 01 September 2011

Napranum, Qld (Australia): 30 August 2011 http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery_Aug_11.html

CONFERENCES

CERF 2011 Conference (Daytona Beach, Florida, 6-10 November 2011)

21st Biennial Conference of the Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation.

Societies, Estuaries and Coasts: Adapting to Change

This theme reflects a growing realization that human societies are an integral component of ecosystems and the dynamics of these societies and ecosystems are interactive - their futures are interdependent. Nowhere is this more evident than in the estuaries and coastal zones of the planet, where human populations are concentrated, typically dominating estuarine watersheds and affecting their linkage with the local, regional, and global dynamics of the coastal ocean. CERF as a professional scientific society has increasingly focused not only on understanding causes of ecosystem change but providing information necessary to manage anthropogenic changes that have impacted the biodiversity and sustainability of estuarine and coastal systems. This conference will highlight new findings and perspectives of the interactive dynamics of diverse ecosystems and human societies, and in particular, explore how these dynamics can only be understood and managed when addressed at regional and global scales. To a greater extent than in previous CERF conferences this will include an effort to specifically address socioeconomic drivers and responses.

Please visit the conference & workshop web site for further details: <http://www.sgmeet.com/cerf2011/>

FROM HQ

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

Seagrass-Watch Magazine <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/magazine.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>

Future sampling dates <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/sampling.html>

Handy Seagrass Links <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/links.html>

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Seagrass-Watch HQ is supported by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), Fisheries Queensland (a service of the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation) and by private donations.

Seagrass-Watch E- Bulletin is compiled by Len McKenzie & Rudi Yoshida.