31 October 2011

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IN THIS BULLETIN

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

NEWS

Dredging of disease-hit Gladstone waters stops again as scientists determine impact (QLD, Australia)

29 October 2011, Courier Mail

The largest dredge operating in disease-hit Gladstone waters has stopped work while scientists determine how much its operation may contribute to muddy harbour conditions. Water quality tests are being conducted before, during and after the stoppage which has coincided with big tides.

Turbidity levels have spiked during previous big tides. With more king tides looming in the run-up to Christmas, it is hoped the issue can be clarified before then. Greens environment spokeswoman Larissa Waters said the latest dredging suspension demonstrated the need for an urgent review.

"With reports of more dead dugongs and turtles and still no established cause of what's making the fish and the residents of Gladstone sick, it's critical that federal Environment Minister Tony Burke review his approval for the remaining 44 million cubic metres to be dredged."

more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/archives_11.html

Call for slack hunters to clean up (QLD, Australia)

28 October 2011, by Mark Roy, Torres New Online

Leaving turtle and dugong waste dumped on the Tamwoy foreshore is attracting crocodiles and ruining the recent beautification works on the esplanade, according to a concerned Waiben resident.

Percy Misi says while many local hunters are doing the right thing, and taking the shell, bones and offal back out to sea, many simply leave it on the beach. “This is not following ailan kastom, or the traditional way of disposing of the waste, which is to take it offshore and dispose of it in deep water,” Mr Misi said. “Cutting turtle and dugong and leaving the waste creates a bad image.

more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/archives_11.html

Another dugong dies in harbour (QLD, Australia)

26 October 2011, by Marlina Whop, ABC Online

The death of another dugong in the Gladstone harbour in central Queensland has added to concerns that industrial activity is harming marine life. The dead dugong is an adult female - about two metres in length. Fishermen found it floating in the Gladstone harbour yesterday afternoon.

Environmental inspectors have towed the dugong to shore to conduct an autopsy. They say its in an advanced state of decomposition. The cause of the death is not known but fishermen say it is further proof that dredging in the harbour and increased boat traffic is affecting the water quality. Several other dugongs have been found dead this year, along with dolphins and turtles.

more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/archives_11.html

Dead turtles found in dark slick (QLD, Australia)

10 October 2011, by Tony Moore, Brisbane Times

The state government is investigating the death of two turtles found on the southern edge of Gladstone Harbour by a crab fisherman this morning. Turkey Beach crab hunter Nathan Fox this morning told the ABC that he noticed the two turtles floating dead in a slick of grime on top of the water. The crab hunter said a botanist was taking samples of what appeared to be a "slick", like an oil slick on top of the water. Mr Fox said two turtles were found by the pair about 20 metres off shore at the southern tip of Gladstone Harbour near Turkey Beach. The Department of Environment and Resource Management is today checking the species and details of the recent turtle deaths.

Water quality conditions in Gladstone Harbour has been the subject of intense scrutiny since the heavy rainfall and the start of dredging in the harbour. Some environmentalists have complained the dredging of Gladstone Harbour, associated with the coal seam gas industry expansion, is responsible for changed water conditions.

However the state government has maintained large amounts of freshwater washed downstream following heavy rains created muddy conditions that destroyed turtles' natural food, seagrass. Environment Minister Vicki Darling expressed concern on August 31 that 156 turtles, mostly green turtles, had been found dead in the harbour this year. Ms Darling said green turtles were literally "starving to death".

more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/archives_11.html

Trawler to be used in seagrass removal experiment at Port Geographe (WA, Australia)

05 October 2011, Busselton Dunsborough Mail

An unusual way to remove seagrass wrack from clogging the Port Geographe marina entrance is to be trialed next week. A fishing trawler is planned to be on site for four days from next Wednesday to capture seagrass wrack and release it back into the ocean, away from the marina entrance.

The accumulation of seagrass within the marina entrance was threatening safe navigation and skippers had been warned of the potential danger. In addition to the seagrass trawling trial, a contract had been awarded to bypass approximately 150,000 cubic metres of seagrass wrack and sand from the beach (adjacent to the western groyne) east to Wonnerup and an adjacent offshore location. Work would commence on October 10 and take approximately seven weeks to complete.

more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/archives_11.html

Deaths not expected to hurt turtle numbers(QLD, Australia)

04 October 2011, ABC Far North

A north Queensland ecologist says the green turtle population will remain resilient, despite more than 1,000 animals dying in coastal areas since Cyclone Yasi. James Cook University's Dr Mark Hamann says while the number of recorded deaths is higher than previous years, the population is unlikely to experience a strong decline.

He says the deaths were near the coastline not in offshore areas. Dr Hamann says researchers are planning to study the health of green turtles in offshore areas on the Great Barrier Reef. He says scientists want to examine the creatures in some of the reef's outer islands and atolls. "We're starting to look at ... other projects along the Queensland coast with other user groups such as Indigenous groups, the Torres Strait community etcetera, so we can start to look at other ways of investigating turtle populations along the whole Queensland coast."

more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/archives_11.html

Phuket Lifestyle - Helping to save Phang Nga Bay (Thailand)

30 October 2011, Phuket Gazette

More than 200 men, women and children gathered recently at pristine Phang Nga Bay to release 200,000 baby shrimp into the sea to enhance the local ecosystem. Phang Nga Bay is a marine conservation zone that encompasses Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi territory. The Phang Nga Bay ecosystem includes mangroves, coral reefs, sea grass, shrimp, squid, molluscs, small fish and other marine life. Movie stars, marine biologists, local and Bangkok media, newlyweds, officials and all kinds of locals all gathered at this event organized by Quiksilver to promote visibility of the ecosystem, so it will remain a protected area.

The sea grass must be protected because it acts as a nursery for baby sea life. It provides a place for the smaller marine life to hide so they won't be eaten by larger fish. This protected area is significant to everyone involved in the fishing industry in Phuket, Mr Pitul Panchaiyabum, Director or Marine and Coastal Resources for Conservation Center 5 remarked, adding that, "Tourism is not the only important industry in Phuket. This area needs to remain protected because it's a feeding area for small fish and squid."

Full story and source: http://www.phuketgazette.net/archives/phuketlifestyle/2011/article11305.html

MacDill pitching plan to protect eroding beach (FL, USA)

27October 2011, by Howard Altman, The Tampa Tribune

During his 11 years stationed at MacDill Air Force Base as a master sergeant with U.S. Central Command, Jeff Gareaux spent as much time as he could at the base beaches. But the beach itself is under stress, especially Gadsden Point, on the southeastern edge of the base, near the fourth hole of the base golf course.

Over the last several years, severe erosion has eaten away about seven feet of the beach there, according to MacDill officials. The erosion, which occurs both naturally and from the wake of large container and cruise ships sailing into Tampa, is imperiling not only the sandy strand, but also natural resources like 100-plus-year-old live oaks and large black mangroves.

In July, the base presented an environmental assessment to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for a plan to stop the erosion. The plan calls for sinking about 800 cement structures called "wave attenuators" into a 40,000 square foot area between 300 and 500 feet offshore. Installing the structures would cost about $900,000 and take about six weeks to complete. At high tide, they would be about a foot above water and at low tide almost invisible.

Saving the beach might endanger seagrasses and affect the habitat of endangered species like sea turtles and small tooth saw fish, which would violate several rules protecting "regionally significant natural resources," according to the

Army Corps of Engineers and the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. Aside from sea turtles and saw fish, "you have to worry about manatee," said Chuck Schnepel, chief of the Tampa regulatory section. There is also a concern about seagrass, he said. "We hope you would not install one of these devices over submerged aquatics" like seagrass, he said. MacDill submitted its permit to the corps last week, according to Schnepel.
Full story and source: http://www2.tbo.com/news/breaking-news/2011/oct/27/macdill-pitching-plan-to-protect-eroding-beach-ar-298497/

Vanishing Western Port marshes muddy the waters (Vic, Australia)

25 October 2011, by Cameron Lucadou-Wells, Pakenham Weekly

A conservation group has called for urgent protection of disappearing seagrass meadows and saltmarshes in Western Port's wetlands. Western Port Seagrass Partnership is lobbying the state and federal governments to create a coastal reserve in the bay's north-east corner, a rural conservation zone east of Koo Wee Rup.

Emeritus Professor Swan said the threatened loss of vital habitat for migratory birds and winter feeding-grounds of the endangered orange-bellied parrot, on top of the damage to seagrass meadows, would be "unforgiveable". Secretary Doug Newton said the group had reluctantly gone public because after three years of lobbying, neither government was taking action on the Ramsar Convention-listed habitat.

Mr Newton said the coastal erosion had spread from public land to adjoining farm properties. Possible solutions could include creating inlets that would offset the high tidal peaks, offshore islands to attenuate waves and planting mangroves to stabilise the shore, he said. A Department of Sustainability and Environment spokesman said the department was "in the early stages of investigating the possible use of artificial reefs and mangrove revegetation" to determine whether they were effective at reducing the erosion.
Full story and source: http://www.caseyweeklyberwick.com.au/news/local/news/general/vanishing-western-port-marshes-muddy-the-waters/2333854.aspx

Upper bay's health iffy (Tampa, FL, USA)

25 October 2011, by Keith Morelli, The Tampa Tribune

On the surface, Old Tampa Bay north of the Courtney Campbell Causeway looks fine. Below the surface: not so good. Even though the Tampa Bay system's overall aquatic health is the best it's been in 60 years, the northern expanse of Old Tampa Bay is a cause for concern, ecologists say.

Seagrass fields, essential to a robust estuary system, are lagging. Persistent algae blooms have tainted the water with an oily terra cotta-colored slick for three of the past four summers. A troubling layer of muck near Safety Harbor is getting bigger and deeper. The situation has reached critical mass, and the Tampa Bay Estuary Program is spearheading a three-year study to identify problems north of the Courtney Campbell Causeway.

The far-reaching evaluation and assessment of water quality will begin this fall and be conducted by Janicki Environmental, a St. Petersburg consulting firm. The study, funded largely through a $1.2 million grant from the Southwest Florida Water Management District, will take a look at nutrient influxes, hydrologic changes and water circulation patterns and how all that affects the natural flush of the northern reaches of Old Tampa Bay.
Full story and source: http://www2.tbo.com/news/news/2011/oct/25/menewso1-upper-bays-health-iffy-ar-274437/

Troublesome blooms likely in the bay this summer (QLD, Australia)

20 October 2011, by Tony Moore, BrisbaneTimes

January's floods have caused the environmental health of Moreton Bay to slip for the third consecutive year, according to the latest Healthy Waterways report. The floods have doubled the extent of the mud layer inside the bay to 100 square kilometres, according to Professor Paul Greenfield from the Healthy Waterways expert scientific panel.

He said Moreton Bay had been struggling to recover since heavy rains broke the drought in 2009 and forced millions of tonnes of sediments and nutrients through the rivers to the bay. This might mean troublesome algal blooms in Moreton Bay this summer as warmer weather begins and affect the quality of seagrass beds in Moreton Bay, he said.

Overall the conditions in Moreton Bay have slipped from a C to a C minus on the environmental health scale which runs from A to F, according to the report issued yesterday. Perhaps unsurprisingly, southeast Queensland's main river systems - the Lower Brisbane, Oxley Creek and Redland catchments - have all "failed" the water quality tests for 2011. Despite this, some freshwater river systems did recorded improved water quality, mainly north of Brisbane and in the Bremer River. Professor Greenfield said considering the magnitude of the flood, the 2011 report card grades were more positive than the scientific panel expected.
Full story and source: http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/troublesome-blooms-likely-in-the-bay-this-summer-20111020-1m9i9.html

Fears Moreton Bay 'heading down gurgler' (QLD, Australia)

20 October 2011, By Francis Tapim and Siobhan Barry, ABC News

Conservationists say governments have to find the money to protect south-east Queensland's waterways, after a report showed Moreton Bay's health has fallen from a rating of 'C' to 'C minus' for the third year in a row. Although the latest report card on the health of region's waterways has found 21 have improved since last year, 10 have become worse. Eight river systems scored the worst rating of 'F', including the Lower Brisbane, Oxley and Redlands Catchments.

Queensland Conservation Council (QCC) spokesman Simon Baltais says it will cost around $80 million to improve and protect the waterways. Mr Baltais says the damage has to be reversed before it is too late. "We need over $80 million spent over the next three to five years if we want to stop Moreton Bay heading on a trajectory - in like 15 years or 20 years - where it will be very hard to catch a fish and you will probably won't see a dugong again. "Moreton Bay is heading down the gurgler."

Full story and source: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-10-20/fears-moreton-bay-heading-down-gurgler/3580600?section=qld

Youths learn about sea life (FL, USA)

18 October 2011, By Lisa Moore, Herald-Tribune

Isa Bell-Perez, a homeschooled first-grader, waded through the seagrass beds of Sarasota Bay outside of Mote Marine in search of creatures with her classmates. The activity was one of several designed for Mote Marine's Homeschool Day on Sept. 21. A puffer fish, a sea horse and shrimp were some of the critters Isa found before uncovering a tiny snail from her net with help of her grandmother Mary Ann Perez-Rose. After collecting specimens, the students and parents gathered under a tiki hut to listen to Miranda Wrobel, the public programs coordinator, talk about the animals.

Full story and source: http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20111018/ARTICLE/111019546/-1/news?Title=Youths-learn-about-sea-life

Japan pushes base plans forward (Japan)

17 October 2011, UPI.com

Japan's defense minister says it remains committed to relocating U.S. Marines to a controversial site north of the current base on Okinawa.

The plan to move Marine Corps Air Station Futenma is opposed by residents of Okinawa who fear a replacement runway on reclaimed land off Camp Schwab will damage coral reefs and the endangered dugong, which is a relative to the manatee, Stars and Stripes reported Monday. Defense Minister Yasuo Ichikawa told Okinawa officials the government will complete an environmental study by the end of the year.

Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima said local opposition could hold up the project indefinitely and derail efforts to keep the air station on Okinawa, the newspaper said. The relocation is part of a larger plan to shift the location of U.S. military forces in Japan and move about 8,600 Marines to Guam.

Full story and source: http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2011/10/17/Japan-pushes-base-plans-forward/UPI-30141318865261/?spt=hs&or=tn

Resort conserving dugongs with Berungus people (Sabah, Malaysia)

14 October 2011, Borneo Post

Shangri-La's Tanjung Aru Resort and Spa is working to conserve dugongs and their habitat through cooperation with the communities of the proposed Tun Mustapha Park in northern Sabah. The initial cooperation is between the resort and the community at Berungus, Pitas. The cooperation was recognized this week at the Second Coral Triangle Initiative Regional Business Forum in Kuala Lumpur.

The cooperation supports fisheries management and dugong habitat conservation by the Berungus community residing within the boundaries of the proposed Tun Mustapha Park. The proposed park area is home to Malaysia's second largest concentration of coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds and endangered marine species, including turtles and dugongs. Tun Mustapha Park is a key component of Malaysia's action plan for the Coral Triangle Initiative.

Part of the resort's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative includes a dugong protection programme which supports the protection of dugongs and their habitat, and the implementation of sustainable fishing practices. Shangri-La's Tanjung Aru Resort and Spa has also adopted the dugong as its official mascot.

Full story and source: http://www.theborneopost.com/2011/10/14/resort-conserving-dugongs-with-berungus-people-latest/

Boaties asked to save the seabed (QLD, Australia)

10 October 2011, by Judith Kerr, Bayside Bulletin

Boaties are being urged to swap conventional moorings for environmentally friendly alternatives to protect Moreton Bay's seagrass beds. Three types of environmentally friendly mooring designs, tested over a two-year period, were promoted at a forum in Manly last week. The three styles investigated – Newcastle's Seagrass Friendly Mooring, Sweden's Seaflex, and Western Australia's Ezyrider – were found to reduce damage to seagrass beds in Moreton Bay. The moorings, which cost upwardly from $3000, come with shock absorbers and include stretchy elastic-type ropes to stop the mooring ripping up the seabed.

SEQ Catchments coastal and aquatic systems manager Sean Galvin said conventional boat moorings caused extensive damage to marine habitats of species such as turtles and dugongs. He said the cost of the environmentally friendly moorings was identified as a key issue in their widespread uptake. The mooring trial was funded by the federal government's Caring for our Country initiative, SEQ Catchments, Fisheries Queensland, Maritime Safety Queensland, University of Queensland, Seagrass-Watch, Tangalooma Resort, Moreton Bay Seafood Association and local mooring owners.

Moreton Bay Seagrass-Watch's Simon Baltais said in 2001 his organisation had noticed odd, pale-coloured circles and arcs around vessels moored at Redland Bay. His organisation examined aerial photographs to identify spots where seagrass had degenerated. On closer inspection he found "bare seafloor, the result of anchor chains on vessels removing seagrass as the vessels moved with the wind and tides". In 2009, the seagrass watchdog set up six sub-tidal sites, two close to moorings, to monitor the seabed before the new environmentally friendly moorings were in place. Monitoring at all six sites was completed by mid December 2009.

Full story and source: http://www.baysidebulletin.com.au/news/local/news/general/boaties-asked-to-save-the-seabed/2318903.aspx

Military drones may help study seagrass off Levy coast (FL, USA)

7 October 2011, by Karen Voyles, OCALA.com

Technology developed by the military may be flying over coastal Levy County in 2012, giving scientists a way to determine if they can monitor natural resources more effectively from the sky. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute is asking local and federal agencies for permission to use small research drones — unmanned aircraft — to map and monitor seagrass beds.

Paul Carlson, the research scientist leading the project, has several reasons for wanting to conduct the research along Levy County's coastline. Among his top reasons are that the area is home to a portion of one of Florida's two largest, contiguous seagrass beds. Also, Carlson said Cedar Key has an airport that is close to the area being studied and has minimal air traffic during weekdays, when the work is scheduled. Carlson's plan is to have two of the unmanned aircraft fly — one at a time — in grid patterns over the seagrass beds while he and others work on the water.

Full story and source: http://www.ocala.com/article/20111007/ARTICLES/111009790

Presidential Gulf Coast task force outlines restoration strategies (FL, USA)

05 October 2011, by Mark Schleifstein, The Times-Picayune

The federal-state Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force today released a wide-ranging list of strategies for repairing damage done to Gulf of Mexico ecosystems by the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill and by other long-term threats. The main report contains mostly policy-level recommendations, leaving more specific prescriptions to an appendix of existing and proposed projects recommended by each of the five states bordering the Gulf. The report endorses using the majority of Clean Water Act fine money resulting from the oil spill, which could be as much as $5 billion to $20 billion, for Gulf recovery efforts, in addition to current funding for such projects.

The task force adopted four broad goals for its strategy:

Restore and conserve habitat, including wetlands, coastal prairies and forests, estuaries, seagrass beds, natural beaches, dunes and barrier islands.

Restore water quality, in particular reducing the excess nutrients flowing down the Mississippi River system that create an annual low-oxygen "dead zone" covering an average 6,700 square miles along the coasts of Louisiana and Texas.

Replenish and protect living coastal and marine resources, including depleted populations of fish and wildlife species and their degraded habitats.

Enhance community resilience to a variety of threats, including storm risk, sea-level rise, land loss, natural-resource depletion and compromised water quality.

To accomplish those goals, the task force said it will rely largely on voluntary programs and increased cooperation among coastal states and their inland neighbors, and between the states and the federal agencies that enforce natural resource laws.

Full story and source: http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2011/10/presidential_gulf_coast_task_f.html

GALLERY

Roebuck Bay, Broome, WA (Australia): 30 October 2011 http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html

Mackay - Whitsunday, Qld (Australia): 24 - 27 October 2011 http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html

Hamilton Is, 24 October 2011
Sarina Inlet, 25 October 2011
Pioneer Bay, 26 October 2011
Midge Point, 27 October 2011

Cockle Bay, Magnetic Island, Qld (Australia): 26 October 2011 http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html

Mabuiag Is, Torres Strait, Qld (Australia): 25- 26 October 2011 http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html

Broome, WA (Australia): 15 - 16 October 2011 http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html

Demco, Roebuck Bay, 15 October 2011
Level 1: Classroom, 15 October 2011
Level 1: Field, Town Beach, 16 October 2011

Tinnanbar, Great Sandy Strait, Qld (Australia): 12 October 2011 http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html

Archer Point , Qld (Australia): 06 October 2011 http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html

Badu Island, Torres Strait, Qld (Australia): 07 - 08 October 2011 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 (18,768 views to date)

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/

ICRS 2012 (Cairns, Australia from 9 – 13 July 2012)

12th International Coral Reef Symposium
In July 2012, the world's leading natural scientists, resource managers, conservationists, economists, educators and students will meet together in Cairns, Australia for the 12th International Coral Reef symposium.
This major international scientific conference is held every four years and provides the latest knowledge and leading edge technologies about coral reefs and reef environments worldwide.
This 5 day event will bring together 2,500 people from some 80 countries, to communicate their science and hear the latest advances from the international experts in coral reef science. This research and findings will be fundamental in informing international and national policies and protocols in the conservation and sustainable use of coral reefs and the coral reef environment.

Mini-Symposium: Seagrasses and seagrass ecosystems (http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/conferences/ICRS2012/Flyer_ICRS2012_Seagrass.pdf)
Seagrass meadows are an important component of tropical coastal waters. They are part of the complex ecosystem that supports the productivity of coral reefs and reef environments. There is evidence that seagrass populations are declining and this will impact on associated ecosystems. Our knowledge of tropical seagrass systematics, ecology, trends, connectivity and the anthropogenic threats to seagrass communities has improved greatly in the last decade. The symposium will bring together recent findings to enhance our understanding of seagrass associated with coral reef environments.

Important dates:

1 February 2012 - Presenters to have registered
1 March 2012 - Early bird registration closes
1 March 2012 - Manuscripts for Proceedings due
30 March 2012 - Photographic competition closes

FROM HQ

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