



Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

28 February 2013

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NEWS

Twenty-six countries meet to progress Dugong and seagrass conservation (United Arab Emirates)

23 February 2013, UNEP/CMS Abu Dhabi Office

The Second Signatory State Meeting for the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs and their Habitats throughout their Range (Dugong MOU) was hosted by the Government of the Philippines on 19 and 20 February in Manila, Philippines.

While dugong populations and seagrass habitats remain threatened, the Second Signatory State Meeting for the Dugong MOU highlights the fact that considerable progress is being made. The ten new Signatories to the MOU since the first meeting in 2010 and the proposed international Global Environment Facility (GEF) Project in seven countries are encouraging signs for supporters of dugong conservation. The governments of the 26 nations attending are demonstrating their commitment to take positive action. A number of coastal communities that have been approached to participate in conservation projects have shown their willingness to make adjustments in an effort to live in harmony with dugongs. The plight for survival of the charismatic dugong has captured people's imagination on an international scale.

The meeting attracted government officials and experts to consider the conservation status of dugongs and share information on related conservation efforts worldwide. Leading authorities on marine mammals, in particular

Professor Helene Marsh from James Cook University (Australia) and Dr. John Reynolds from Mote Marine Laboratory (United States of America) gave presentations highlighting the challenges facing dugong and seagrass conservationists. These marine mammals are affected by a range of human-related threats such as capture in net fishing gear and habitat degradation. In addition, extreme weather patterns such as severe storm events destroy critical seagrass beds on which dugongs depend.

full story: <http://www.ameinfo.com/twenty-six-countries-meet-progress-dugong-seagrass-330727>

related article: <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/65335/more-countries-sign-pact-to-protect-dugong>

Extinction fears for Gladstone seagrass (QLD, Australia)

15 February 2013, by William Rollo, ABC online

A Gladstone-based ecology expert says she is concerned two species of seagrass in the central Queensland city's harbour may now be extinct. CQUniversity Professor Marnie Campbell says the two species are a vital food and habitat resource for native dugongs and turtles. Professor Campbell says current surveying methods cannot adequately track rare types of seagrass.

She says she is proposing a new study that would make up the shortfall. "We've looked at records of the seagrass distribution, then gone and checked all those sites and we just couldn't find it," she said. "So we definitely know when we've been out at these sites that those species were not there. "What we've tried to do is get some more funding so we can actually go out and do a more comprehensive survey of the harbour to find them."

However, James Cook University seagrass expert Michael Rasheed disagrees. Dr Rasheed sits on the Dredge Technical Reference Panel, which provides advice to the Gladstone Ports Corporation through its massive dredging program. He says the hypothesis does not match their data. "I think that the two seagrass species that they named, certainly with *Halophila spinulosa* I don't think there's much danger of it becoming extinct," he said.

source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-02-15/extinction-fears-for-gladstone-seagrasses/4521660?section=qld>

Dugongs under threat (QLD, Australia)

2 February 2013, by Tony Moore, Brisbane Times

Queensland Environment Minister Andrew Powell admits dugongs could be under threat from thick sediment now being washed down the Brisbane River. More than 80 per cent of Moreton Bay's seagrass beds were lost in some areas after sediment flowed into the bay in 2011. Mr Powell said some dugongs could die as a result of the sediment, but said others would leave. "It's true that if the sea grass is in short supply, a small proportion of the population can be expected to die," he said. "But most of the dugongs will move away from the area and return as the sea grass beds recover."

Two Griffith University ecologists yesterday told Fairfax Media they believed the sediment – four times as dense as river sediment after January 2011 floods – were now pushing Moreton Bay close to an environmental tipping point.

Mr Powell said flood plumes from the 2010-2011 flood events which caused significant damage to Moreton Bay's seagrass beds, could be higher this time around. "Sediment washed into Moreton Bay after the Australia Day long weekend storms may be higher than two years ago, given the sediment load in the Brisbane River is four times higher than then," Mr Powell said yesterday. "We lost more than 80 per cent of sea grass in some locations and marine life was affected for more than a year afterwards." Mr Powell said he understood the turtle and dugong populations would recover. "Indications at the end of last year were that they were recovering fairly well," he said.

However Professor Rod Connolly this week disagreed with Mr Powell. "What I think is that seagrass beds that were fine last time are now tipped over the edge of what they can cope with," he said.

Full story: <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/environment/animals/dugongs-under-threat-20130201-2dqj3.html>

New research investigates carbon absorption in seagrass beds (NSW, Australia)

01 February 2013, ABC News

Scientists are conducting research on the NSW south coast to determine whether the destruction of seagrass beds is releasing large amounts of ancient carbon into the atmosphere. A University of Technology Sydney team is taking sediment cores where seismic testing at Jervis Bay in the 1960s blew large holes in seagrass beds. The holes can still be seen from space.

Lead researcher, Peter Macreadie, thinks thousands of years worth of carbon stored in the sediment beneath the seagrass beds has since been leaking into the atmosphere. He says recent studies have revealed the importance of seagrass, finding that it can capture carbon 35 times faster than tropical rainforest and store it for thousands of years. "Australia's seagrasses are off-setting about 2% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions," he said. "And if you're going to put a carbon price on that that's about \$45-billion. "And if we to lose the rest of Australia's seagrasses, it's equivalent to releasing potentially up to 3 times Australia's annual greenhouse gas emissions.

source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-02-01/seaweed/4495832>

Bay's better water quality is good news for sea grass, fish (FL, USA)

19 February 2013, by Craig Pittman, Tampa Bay Times

For nearly 40 years, biologists have been measuring Tampa Bay's water quality and hoping it will get cleaner. Last year, for only the fourth time, the state's largest estuary met all of its water quality targets, the experts from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program announced Tuesday. They're just not sure why.

Since 1974 the estuary program's scientists have checked the quality in the four sections of the bay — Old Tampa Bay, Hillsborough Bay, Middle Tampa Bay and Lower Tampa Bay — to see whether the water is clean enough to promote the natural recovery of sea grass. Sea grasses are crucial to the health of the bay, but decades ago they declined sharply and by 1982 there were only 22,000 acres left.

By 2011, though, strenuous local government efforts to clean up pollution flowing into the bay had encouraged the spread of sea grass until it covered nearly 33,000 acres of the bay, leading to a rebound of fish population, particularly redfish and spotted sea trout. The bay's water quality has fluctuated, as measured by the amount of microscopic algae in the water (as indicated by chlorophyll, a plant pigment) and the amount of visible sunlight penetrating the water. Both are important indicators for the growth of sea grass.

Full story: <http://www.tampabay.com/news/environment/water/tampa-bays-water-quality-improved-may-signal-rebound-in-sea-grass-and-fish/1275758>

CONFERENCES

CERF 2013 Conference (San Diego, California, 3-7 November 2013)

22nd Biennial Conference of the Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation
Toward Resilient Coasts and Estuaries, Science for Sustainable Solutions.

CERF advances understanding and wise stewardship of estuarine and coastal ecosystems worldwide. Its mission is to: Promote research in estuarine and coastal ecosystems, Support education of scientists, decision-makers and the public, and Facilitate communication among these groups.

The Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation is the only scientific society whose members focus exclusively on the essential intersection of research, management and restoration of estuarine and coastal ecosystems.

The 2013 scientific program offers four days of timely, exciting and diverse information on a vast array of estuarine and coastal subjects. Presentations will include discoveries and synthesis on the adaptive dynamics of coastal and estuarine ecosystems and human societies. Participants will explore how these dynamics and adaptations can be understood and managed at regional and global scales.

CERF will convene about 1,600 Scientists, Managers and professionals in government, business, nonprofit and related organizations, and Graduate students.

From North America's coastal states and provinces, as well as from more than 20 countries around the world, CERF conference attendees are scientists and managers who conduct research and observe/manage change within a variety of global coastal and estuarine habitats. They rely on the information, expertise, methods, products, technology and innovative equipment your organization provides.

Please visit the conference & workshop web site for further details: <http://www.erf.org/cerf2013>

SEAGRASS-WATCH Workshops 2012

Australia <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/training.html#workshop13>

Noosa, Qld (Australia): 09-10 March 2013

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 23,00 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 Giuseppe Di Carlo 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>

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