31 December 2015

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IN THIS BULLETIN

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NEWS

Help seagrass and seahorse conservation from the comfort of your home (UK)

31 December 2015, Dorset Echo

Help research seahorses and seagrass from the comfort of your home with a new conservation initiative. The citizen-based science project, the Community Seagrass Initiative (CSI), has been set up to new and existing volunteers to help analyse thousands of underwater photographs of seagrass habitats along the South West coast via their computer. The idea of the tool is to allow people to get involved with CSI’s research, without getting their feet wet.

The project covers 191 miles of the coast from Weymouth to Looe in Cornwall. The idea is to find out more about native seagrass and seahorses to help conserve their fragile eco-systems. The group said their aim is to engage coastal communities with their special marine habitats to raise awareness and promote conservation. People will get the chance to look at thousands of images taken from baited cameras and SCUBA diver surveys, using the Zooniverse research platform.

Volunteers for CSI will be able to take part in two different methods of analysis on the website - dive into seagrass density and check out commercial fisheries species. Dive into seagrass density allows users to look at photographs to assess how much seagrass is visible in the shot, as well as report the presence of any other marine life or algae. In check out commercial fisheries species, volunteers will be able to look at pictures taken at baited underwater cameras, so they can identify different species of fish, crustaceans and molluscs that are important commercially.
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html

Seagrass recharges 360sqkm of marine bed across country (India)

29 December 2015, Times of India

The first-ever nationwide research is being conducted to study carbon sequestration by seagrass in Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay , Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chilika lagoon, Gulf of Kutch and Lakshadweep. Funded by the Union ministry of environment, forests and climate change, the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management is studying how these organisms can help mitigate or defer global warming.

The country possesses an abundant seagrass cover stretching over 360 sqkm. Of this, 172.5sqkm is in Palk Bay and 85.5 sqkm in Gulf of Mannar. In Chilika lagoon, it is spread over 80sqkm. Study has been completed in four of the six areas and researchers have mapped all the areas where seagrass is found. Study is yet to begin in Lakshadweep and Gulf of Kutch. Of the 58 species recognised so far across the world, India has 14 species and all of them are found in Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay . Lakshadweep sea bed is home to eight species, nine are found in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Researchers say the main aim of this study, which began last year, is to guide policy makers and give them the required information to help protect this effective and endangered ecosystem. Not a commodity that can be cultivated directly, its economic value can be measured through commercial fishing and wildlife tourism. Moreover, most of the fish species spend at least part of their life cycle inside the sea grass community, which reveals that seagrass is vital to fishing industry, say experts.
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html

Related articles:
http://netindian.in/news/2015/12/29/00036202/national-steering-committee-climate-change-approves-four-projects
http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/Centre-Clears-Projects-Worth-Rs-60-Crore/2015/12/29/article3200786.ece

Dredging for coal port near Barrier Reef gets nod from Australia (Australia)

22 December 2015, Reuters UK

Australia approved on Tuesday a controversial expansion of the Abbot Point coal terminal, which environmentalists fear will damage the Great Barrier Reef but supporters say is needed to protect the sector from decline. The expansion work will require dredging 1.1 million cubic metres of seabed near the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, which will then be disposed of on land to make way for what will become one of the world's biggest export terminals for coal. Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt issued the approval only after reengineering reduced dredging by 97 percent from the original proposal, according to Hunt's spokesman.

The work still requires approval from the Queensland state government, which is awaiting assurances that a giant coal mine owned by Indian conglomerate Adani Enterprises will be developed. Adani has blamed opposition to its mine for delays in moving the $7 billion project to the construction phase.

The region around the port is home to dolphins and dugongs, which rely on the seagrass there for food. It is also a habitat for turtles and giant manta rays and is in the path of migrating humpback whales. Coal production is rising in Australia even as many developed countries view the fuel as a sunset business.
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html

Related articles:
Abbot Point coal port expansion project has strict rules on sediment (The Australian)
http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/mining-energy/abbot-point-coal-port-expansion-project-has-strict-rules-on-sediment/news-story/012f9b342d2f282433c1e34b9b6fb8eb
Australia OKs Expansion of Coal Port Near Great Barrier Reef (ABC News)
http://abcnews.go.com/International
Australian Government agreed building of coal terminal near Great Barrier Reef (Maritime News)
http://www.newsmaritime.com/2015/australian-government-agreed-building-of-coal-terminal-near-great-barrier-reef/
UNESCO does not expect Abbot Point Coal Terminal expansion to hurt Great Barrier Reef (ABC Online)
http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-24/unesco-not-worried-by-reef-ports/7052924

Australia approves dredging for coal port near Barrier Reef (American Journal of Transportation)
http://www.ajot.com/news/australia-approves-dredging-for-coal-port-near-barrier-reef
Greg Hunt still determined to kill the Great Barrier Reef (Sydney Morning Herald)
http://www.smh.com.au/comment/view-from-the-street/view-from-the-street-greg-hunts-still-determined-to-kill-the-great-barrier-reef-20151223-glu8la.html
Australia okays coal port expansion near Barrier Reef (The Asian Age)
http://www.asianage.com/international/australia-okays-coal-port-expansion-near-barrier-reef-233
Canberra approves coal port expansion (Taipei Times)
http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/biz/archives/2015/12/23/2003635424
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Australia approves Abbot Point coal port expansion (BBC News)
http://www.bbc.com/news/business-35157946
Australia approves coal port expansion near Great Barrier Reef (The Japan Times)
http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/12/22/asia-pacific/australia-approves-coal-port-expansion-near-great-barrier-reef/
Australia Approves Expansion of Barrier Reef Coal Terminal (Wall Street Journal)
http://www.wsj.com/articles/australia-approves-expansion-of-barrier-reef-coal-terminal-1450762127
Reef will be protected despite port expansion: Queensland government (Sydney Morning Herald)
http://www.smh.com.au/business/energy/reef-will-be-protected-despite-port-expansion-queensland-government-20151222-gltfvv.html

Shore Thing: UVA Scientists Develop New Way to Fund Coastal Restoration (USA)

17 December 2015, University of Virginia

University of Virginia environmental scientists have co-authored a new methodology to encourage global coastal restoration on the voluntary carbon market for projects that help bring back carbon-storing tidal wetlands and seagrass meadows. The protocol, which quantifies the greenhouse gas mitigation achieved by coastal restoration projects, has been adopted by the Verified Carbon Standard, a global benchmark for carbon management. It was presented last week at the international climate conference in Paris.

The protocol, called Methodology for Tidal Wetlands and Seagrass Restoration, is the first globally applicable, greenhouse gas accounting plan for coastal wetland restoration, and will allow salt marsh, seagrass and other tidal wetland restoration projects to earn financial support from the purchase of carbon offsets.

According to the methodology, each carbon-offset credit would certify the removal of one ton of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Coastal restoration projects that demonstrate a net removal of carbon by plants would receive a proportional number of credits from Verified Carbon Standard. Carbon credits are purchased by companies or individuals to offset the emissions they cannot reduce, creating a financial mechanism for restoration of habitats with a climate benefit. Similar financing already is available to reforestation projects through initiatives offered by the United Nations. Prior to the new methodology, projects that restored coastal plants were not eligible to receive carbon credits.
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html

Fighting to Protect the Dugongs of Japan's Henoko Bay (Japan)

16 December 2015, Earthjustice

The new governor of Okinawa, Japan takes local sovereignty seriously, and he's using his position to oppose U.S. military development that would threaten the Okinawa dugong. But this gentle giant of the sea won't be spared without a fight. The waters surrounding the Japanese island of Okinawa are home to some of the few remaining Okinawa dugongs, rare, genetically isolated and critically endangered members of the dugong species. Dugongs are central to the creation mythology, folklore and rituals of the people of Okinawa. Because of its cultural significance, Japanese law protects the dugong as a cultural monument.

Despite the importance of the dugong to the local people and its status as an endangered species, the American and Japanese governments are planning to construct a military base on landfill in Henoko Bay, one of the most important remaining habitats for the Okinawa dugong. The construction plans for the new base call for dredging and dumping large amounts of landfill into Henoko Bay, destroying the seagrass beds on which the dugongs rely for food. Construction and operation of the base will cause serious contaminant pollution from sedimentation and run-off, equipment and aircraft fuels, waste and ordinance storage. Noise and light pollution will also harass the quiet-loving dugong. These threats put the Okinawa dugong in real danger of extinction.

Earlier this year, Takeshi Onaga was elected governor of Okinawa on a platform that included promises to stop base construction and relieve the undue burden of the U.S. military presence on the Okinawan people. His election showed the central government in Tokyo how strong anti-military sentiment is in the local population. Governor Onaga recently delivered on his promise to do everything in his power to halt base construction by overturning his predecessor's approval of a land reclamation permit necessary for construction of the new base. The Japanese

federal government immediately filed a lawsuit against Governor Onaga, claiming that his action threatens national security and is contrary to the will of the Japanese people.

Governor Onaga's stand against military operations in Okinawa and the overwhelming support of his constituents sends an important message to the United States and the Japanese government: the will of the local population is clearly against new military bases in Henoko, or indeed anywhere in Okinawa, and ignoring these calls for greater environmental and human rights protections will plague the U.S.-Japan relationship until local voices are heard. Washington and Tokyo cannot continue to insist on a single course of action in Henoko that threatens both the dugong and the human rights of Okinawan citizens.
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html

EDITORIAL: Military station has no place in Henoko's 'sea of treasures' (Japan)

16 December 2015, Asahi Shimbun

The government is poised to embark on a landfill project to proceed with the planned relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to the Henoko district in Nago, Okinawa Prefecture. The project entails dumping 21 million cubic meters of soil and sand in Oura Bay, which happens to be a veritable "sea of treasures" boasting world-class biodiversity. The government must rethink this project.

An environmental assessment report compiled by the Okinawa Defense Bureau of the Defense Ministry lists as many as 5,334 species of marine life. These include 262 endangered species designated by the Environment Ministry and others. The dugong, a national treasure, is among them. Researchers have been awed by this sheer biodiversity, which ranks among the top in the world.

According to "Ourawan no Ikimonotachi" (Life in Oura Bay), an illustrated encyclopedia compiled by local divers and published by Nanpou Shinsha, the bay itself and the mouth of the Ourakawa river that flows into the bay feature an astoundingly diverse environment that ranges from mangroves to tidal flats, coral reefs, seaweed and seagrass beds, sandy or muddy areas and even 60-meter-deep valleys. All these features interact with one another to form a rich ecosystem that sustains this amazing biodiversity.

The area has the most stringent "Rank 1" environmental protection designation under the prefectural guidelines. There are plans to relocate the dugong's feeding grounds and transplant corals elsewhere, but some experts believe the chances of success are slim. And yet, former Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima, the predecessor of current Governor Takeshi Onaga, gave the green light to the reclamation project.

Onaga revoked his predecessor's reclamation permit mainly because he judged that the "actual situation and the project's impact on the environment could hardly be said to have been assessed accurately," and that he "could not possibly say that appropriate environmental protection measures have been worked out." It would be a terrible shame to lose this "sea of treasures" that boasts biodiversity that ranks among the top in the world. Oura Bay is ideal as a sanctuary for marine creatures, not as the site of a military installation.
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html

Corporate sector asked to help Great Barrier Reef in exchange for branding rights (Australia)

16 December 2015, ABC Online

The Federal Government is turning to multinational companies and philanthropists to help protect the Great Barrier Reef by offering branding rights on programs they sponsor which combat immediate threats. The Partnerships for the Reef 24-page document outlines the sales pitch, detailing what programs they can invest in. Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt encouraged organisations to also come up with their own ideas.

The program complements the Federal Government $140 million Reef Trust fund, which includes $58 million to improve water quality. Key priorities in 2016 include better port planning and engagement with traditional owners and improving water quality.
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html

Four new protected marine areas proposed in Northern Ireland (Ireland)

14 December 2015, BBC News

Northern Ireland is to get four new protected marine areas to conserve important habitats and species, including one of the slowest growing shellfish in the world. They are at Rathlin Island, at the mouth of Belfast Lough, part of Red Bay at Waterfoot, County Antrim, and a section of Carlingford Lough.

In Belfast Lough, the area has been picked to conserve the Ocean Quahog, a type of clam which takes hundreds of years to grow and can reach 500 years of age. The proposed Marine Conservation Zones are out for public

consultation until next spring. At Red Bay in Waterfoot, County Antrim, it is to protect a healthy seagrass site which is an important nursery for juvenile fish.

The proposed sites have been backed by the Northern Ireland Marine Task Force, a coalition of 10 environmental groups. Spokesperson Rebecca Hunter said the seas off the coast were home to "some of the most unique and important marine wildlife" and the zones would contribute to the "protection and recovery of our valuable seas". Environment Minister Mark H Durkan, who helped launch the proposed zones, said the move was "an important step".
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html

Seagrass health improves in Sarasota Bay (USA)
11 December 2015, YourObserver.com

Sarasota Bay has seen a resurgence of crucial seagrasses, which the latest data show as the most measured since the Southwest Florida Management District began its mapping program. According to a press release from SWFWMD, seagrasses beds now cover 13,288 acres of the bay, reflecting an increase of 701 acres, or roughly 6% since 2012. All bay segments, which includes Manatee and Sarasota county waters, gained coverage between 2012 and 2014.

The district's formal mapping program began in 1988 but, according to the release, current seagrass coverage is the largest amount measured since the 1950s. Seagrasses are used to measure the health of estuaries every two years using aerial photographs and field surveys.
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html

Seagrass Die-Off Carries Fears Of Another Collapse For Florida Bay (USA)
08 December 2015, WLRN

Almost 30 years ago, a seagrass die-off in Florida Bay led to massive algae blooms in the famous fishing grounds that form the southernmost end of Everglades National Park. The collapse of the bay, and its impact on the recreational and commercial fishing industries of South Florida, helped garner support for Everglades restoration at the state and federal levels. Starting the in late '90s, the bay recovered. But after a prolonged drought, the seagrass has started to die again, bringing fears that another cascade of impacts will follow.

Florida International University marine science professor Jim Fourqurean said researchers have found about 40,000 acres of the bay showing some symptoms from the die-off. Seagrasses provide habitat for prized gamefish and for many species of fish larvae, which later go on to populate the Keys reef. Algae blooms can also wipe out sponge populations, which help filter the water and are used by young lobster.

Scientists suspect the causes of the die-off is similar to that of 1987: prolonged drought and high temperatures, leading to water that is too salty and hot for seagrasses to survive. And the northern part of the bay is still not receiving the right amount of freshwater at the right times from the mainland Everglades, scientists say. Recent rains may have come too late, Fourqurean said.
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html

Coral reefs, seagrasses prevent storm surges, too–Asean expert (Philippines)
08 December 2015, Business Mirror

The Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) has underscored the need for governments to integrate coral reefs and seagrass in its coastal ecosystem-rehabilitation program to strengthen defenses against storm surges. Director Sheila Vergara of the ACB’s Biodiversity Information Management said that, in fact, coral reefs are the first line of defense of coastal communities against storm surges.

Speaking during the ACB’s Biodiversity Reporting 101 symposium at a hotel in Mandaluyong City recently, Vergara said that, like mangroves, corals and seagrass cushion the impact of storm surges before they hit the coastal communities. Without all three coastal or marine ecosystems, communities along the country’s coastlines are at risk of being swept away, she said. Together, she said corals, seagrasses and mangroves serve as breeding grounds and nurseries for certain species of fish, allowing them to grow and replenish the seas with abundant supply of food. She said communities, as well as governments, should consider investing in protecting and rehabilitating damaged corals and seagrass areas the same way that they invest in mangrove tree-planting activities.

However, she cautioned against planting or growing the wrong species, which, she said, will not work. The ACB is advocating the restoration of these habitat-building species naturally, meaning the restoration should specifically pick species that do not deviate from what used to exist in a particular area, by restoring the same species of corals, seagrasses and mangroves, including their structures or layers found in the area to be rehabilitated or restored.
more…….. http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html

UQ in the depths of "blue carbon" research (Australia)

08 December 2015, UQ News

The University of Queensland has an extensive portfolio of "blue carbon" research which seeks to better understand the role of oceans and their ecosystems in reducing carbon emissions and tackling climate change. Professor Catherine Lovelock of UQ's School of Biological Sciences said "blue carbon" was the term used to describe carbon stored in marine and coastal environments.

UQ is leading two of the four work packages of the CSIRO Coastal Carbon Biogeochemistry Cluster which represented investment of $15 million by CSIRO and partners (University of Western Australia, University of Technology Sydney, Southern Cross University, Griffith University, and the Australian Institute of Marine Science) from 2012-2016.

Professor Lovelock said UQ's wide-ranging research included:

Studying seagrass, mangrove and tidal marsh carbon storage and mapping blue carbon environments in Australia and internationally (through UQ's Global Change Institute, the School of Biological Sciences and the UQ School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Management).

Natural resource management of blue carbon assets and economic analyses;

Legal analyses relating to blue carbon (TC Beirne School of Law).

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

Phu Quoc hosts Dugong Festival

29 December 2015, Viet Nam News

Nearly 700 tourists, local leaders and residents on Phu Quoc Island in the southern province of Kien Giang participated in the Dugong Festival 2015 to raise awareness about the protection of Dugong and endangered marine creatures.

The annual event featured a parade from the People's Committee of Ham Ninh commune to Ham Ninh harbour, a popular tourist attraction on the island. After the parade, around 200 secondary school students who are members of six marine conservation clubs on Phu Quoc Island took part Dugong sand sculpture and photo contests and a game show on marine conservation. Each club created a life-size model of a Dugong on the Beach and displayed photos taken by the students this year.

The activity was part of the project titled "Conservation of Dugong and Biodiversity of Phu Quoc and Tho Chu Island" implemented since 2013 by the non-profit organisation Wildlife At Risk and the Phu Quoc Marine Protected Area.

Full story: http://vietnamnews.vn/society/280492/phu-quoc-hosts-dugong-festival.html

Related articles:
http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/society/149426/social-news-30-12.html
http://www.thanhniennews.com/education-youth/phu-quoc-island-hosts-festival-to-raise-awareness-on-dugong-conservation-57467.html

2 'Extinct' Sea Snakes Discovered Off Australian Coast (Australia)

22 December 2015, Live Science

Two species of venomous sea snakes that were thought to be extinct have been discovered slithering off the coast of western Australia. The brownish-purple leaf-scaled sea snake (*Aipysurus foliosquama*) and the yellowish-brown short-nosed sea snake (*Aipysurus apraefrontalis*) once lived among the Ashmore and Hibernia reefs in the Timor Sea, but disappeared between 1998 and 2002, the researchers said.

In fact, intensive reef surveys carried out between 2001 and 2012 failed to find a single *A. foliosquama* or *A. apraefrontalis* in those reefs. However, every once in a while, researchers would hear anecdotal stories about sea snake sightings, though in different places off the western Australia coast. So, a group of scientists launched an exhaustive search for the two snake species. They spent more than 60 hours scuba diving and snorkeling, and more than 25 hours with a manta tow (dragging a snorkel diver behind a small boat). The search was a success, yielding 16 of the purplish *A. foliosquama* and seven of the yellowish *A. apraefrontalis* snakes, the researchers said. Whenever possible, the researchers took small tissue samples from the snakes before setting them free, and then returned to the lab to verify the species with genetic analyses, according to the study.

Surprisingly, the researchers found the snakes in previously unreported habitats. They discovered *A. foliosquama* in the lush seagrass beds of subtropical Shark Bay, located 1,056 miles (1,700 kilometers) south of Ashmore Reef. Grant Griffin, a wildlife officer with Western Australia Parks and Wildlife, also snapped a photo of two courting *A. apraefrontalis* snakes in Ningaloo Reef in April 2013.

Full story: http://www.livescience.com/53190-endangered-sea-snakes-found-in-australia.html

North Queensland traditional owners and WWF-Australia unite to protect marine wildlife (Australia)

17 December 2015, ABC Message Stick

Protecting marine wildlife and the Great Barrier Reef was at the forefront of discussion recently when traditional owners in Mackay formed a partnership with WWF-Australia. Members of the Yuibera Aboriginal Corporation gathered at Shoal Point in Mackay yesterday to sign an agreement. The partnership with WWF-Australia aims to start an Indigenous conservation program to help monitor marine wildlife and water quality around Mackay, Sarina, and Mirani.

After witnessing a decline in turtle and dugong numbers in the region over the years, Yuibera elder Gary Mooney said he hoped the newly formed partnership would help sustain marine wildlife numbers. Darren Grover is the national manager for species and Indigenous partnerships at WWF-Australia, and said the foundation wanted to empower communities to take on more responsibility for managing sea country and wildlife.

Mr Grover said despite the Commonwealth and Queensland government funding Indigenous ranger programs throughout northern Australia, the Great Barrier Reef to a large extent had missed out. Mr Grover said WWF-Australia aimed to build up skills within the community and advocate for funding to go towards establishing a range of programs in the north Queensland region. Next year the foundation plans to set up an event that will involve Indigenous partners getting out on the water, tagging turtles, and monitoring the health of turtles and seagrass in the area.

Full story: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-17/traditional-owners-in-north-qld-sign-partnership-with-wwf/7037046

Govt pledges $58m for Great Barrier Reef (Australia)

05 December 2015, SBS

The federal government will spend $58 million on improving water quality of the Great Barrier Reef and repairing wetlands in the region. Environment Minister Greg Hunt announced the new funding - which makes up phase three of the Reef Trust investment strategy - at major climate talks in Paris on Friday. It will focus on cane farm and horticulture irrigation as well as soil management and grazing erosion reduction. The new money brings the total Trust spend to $91.3 million.

Mr Hunt also announced on Friday he'd "gently encouraged" the United Nations' climate science body to carry out a review into what's known as 'blue carbon' found in marine life like seagrass. Australia is pushing for research into potential carbon emission increases by clearing seagrass and mangroves, while also looking at their potential to store carbon from the air. The government believes they could be more effective than forests in sequestering emissions.

Mr Hunt on Tuesday revealed a domestic research project to investigate Australia's blue carbon potential in hopes of being the first country to include it in national emissions inventory. Australia on Friday approached the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to ask them to look at doing a "special report" into the issue. "There's a great deal of preliminary work that has been done on the extraordinary CO2 reduction capabilities as well as the impact on reducing ocean acidification of enhancing mangroves and seagrass," Mr Hunt said in Paris. The IPCC will determine if the research is warranted.

Full story: http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/12/05/australia-pledges-58-million-great-barrier-reef

Coastal bays report card misses honor roll, remains steady (USA)

04 December 2015, Ocean City Today

For the second straight year, the Maryland Coastal Bays have earned a C+ grade in the Coastal Bays Health Index that measures total nitrogen, total phosphorus, dissolved oxygen, chlorophyll (specifically chlorophyll *a*), seagrass levels and hard clam populations. The Maryland Coastal Bays Program, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science and the Department of Natural Resources all contributed to the report.

Assawoman Bay received a grade of C, which is the same grade earned in 2013 and 2012, but was, according to the report, experiencing a decline from last year’s results. Increases in the concentration of dissolved oxygen is seen as a positive, and decreases in the concentrations of nitrogen, phosphorus and chlorophyll are considered improvements. Conversely, an improvement in nitrogen, phosphorus and chlorophyll represents a decrease in concentration.

To the west of the Assawoman Bay is the St. Martin River, which also maintained its D+ score from last year. The bright spot for the St. Martin River, according to the report, is the chlorophyll levels, which are rated good. Most of the other indicators scored poor or very poor, according to the report. South of the Assawoman Bay is the Isle of Wight Bay, which also maintained its C grade. South of the Isle of Wight is Sinepuxent Bay, which again gained top marks with a B grade. Phosphorus levels and hard clams both improved from “moderate” to “good” in the Sinepuxent, but dissolved oxygen and seagrasses remained moderate.

To the west of the Sinepuxent is Newport Bay, which improved from D+ to C- this year as dissolved oxygen, nitrogen and chlorophyll all improved, according to the study. Seagrasses and hard clams both scored very poor in this bay. Finally, the Chincoteague Bay earned a B- this year, again the same as last year. Seagrasses reportedly improved significantly while hard clams scored very poor.
Full story: http://www.oceancitytoday.net/p/coastal-bays-report-card-misses-honor-roll-remains-steady/1452809

Paris UN Climate Conference 2015: Seagrass a potential solution in climate fight (Australia)
03 December 2015, Sydney Morning Herald

How to make seagrass sexy? That's the problem Carlos Duarte has been trying to solve since at least 2009, when he and fellow marine researchers came up with the term "blue carbon" to describe the surprisingly large role the world's seagrasses, mangroves and salt bushes might play in tackling climate change.

While mangrove and salt bushes can play key roles in protecting fragile coastlines from wave damage and promote biodiversity, it's the humble seagrass that provides the largest potential to store more carbon from the atmosphere. "Firstly there are no forest fires in the water," Professor Duarte, who is also an adjunct professor at the University of WA, said. That compares with the hundred-year cycle - or less for Australia - between blazes that destroy many woodlands and release carbon back to the skies. Secondly, if one plants three trees, in 20 years only one may survive, he said. By contrast, since seagrass clones, billions can grow over a similar period. This grass would be drawing down carbon and even raise sediment levels by as much as 5mm a year or faster than the rising sea-levels, he said.

The value of coastal wetlands is gaining recognition in Australian government circles. Environment Minister Greg Hunt chaired an event at the Paris climate summit on Wednesday, outlining plans to protect the resource and quantify its carbon potential. New research based at the University of Melbourne and funded by the federal government "will also aim to explore how coastal management activities impact on carbon emissions and identify high priority areas for restoration and conservation," he said. The study will measure the existing carbon store, estimated now at about 2.5 billion tonnes of carbon, with the potential of using money from the $2.55 billion Emissions Reduction Fund to extend the resource "if accounting issues are resolved", he said.
Full story: http://www.smh.com.au/environment/un-climate-conference/paris-un-climate-conference-2015-the-surprising-appeal-of-the-humble-sea-grass-20151202-gldyyh.html

Related articles:
http://www.newsweek.com/2015/12/18/why-arent-oceans-cop21-agenda-401780.html

Seagrass solutions aired at Town Board session (USA)
02 December 2015, Shelter Island Reporter

With East End municipalities and Suffolk County awakening to a crisis in water quality threatening the future health of the natural world that surrounds the region, there was some good news presented to the Town Board work session Tuesday. Soren Dahl, an official with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, told the board that Shelter Island, along with only one other location in the Northeast, had thriving meadows of underwater seagrass in its coastal waters.

Ten years ago, species relying on seagrass contributed $1.9 billion in sales of seafood and $1 billion in earned income, according to a Nature Conservancy report. But today, almost 65 percent of the seagrass meadows are gone, beginning their long and perilous decline since the mid-1970s, according to the report. The New York State Seagrass Protection Act of 2012 calls for the development of seagrass areas and to work with local governments, businesses, fishermen, environmental groups and individuals to come up with plans to stop the erosion of the natural resource.

“There’s not a lot left,” Mr. Dahl said, adding that he’s been assigned by the DEC Bureau of Marine Resources to meet officials on a local level to develop plans. Seagrass meadows left around the Island, are found in Coecles Harbor, Dering Harbor and off Ram Island and Hay Beach. Cornell Cooperative Extension has launched projects to plant new seagrass on the East End, but Mr. Dahl said, “it’s much more cost effective to preserve than restore” the meadows that are flourishing. The work to be initiated with the Sheer Island community won’t be “a long term process,” Mr. Dahl said. “The goal is to recognize a resource and have a [preservation] plan to move forward and help guide decisions. “ He would do the lion’s share of work, writing the management plan “to refer to instead of dealing with issues on a case-by-case basis.” He would also assist the town in securing grants for restoration programs.
Full story: http://shelterislandreporter.timesreview.com/2015/12/02/seagrass-solutions-aired-at-town-board-session/

Workshop helps tackle threats to dugongs (Qatar)
01 December 2015, MENAFN.COM

A workshop to help preserve long-living herbivorous marine mammals called dugongs in the Arabian Gulf was held yesterday at Qatar University (QU). Dugongs have a cultural and economic importance to Qataris, having been used

as both an economic and food resource in the Arabian Gulf for more than 7,500 years, it is learnt. Hosted by QU College of Arts and Sciences' (CAS) Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences (DBES), the activity aims to share findings and information about the local dugong population, threats to its habitat and future survival.

The workshop was part of an agreement between QU, ExxonMobil Research Qatar, and Texas A&M University at Galveston (Tamug). CAS associate dean for research and graduate affairs Dr Ahmed Ahmedna, EMRQ rearch director Dr Jennifer Dupont, Tamug Department of Marine Biology associate professor Dr Christopher Marshall, DBES professors and students, and representatives of the General Directorate of Natural Reserves Private Engineering Office (PEO), Ministry of Environment (MoE), Coast Guard and Qatar Petroleum also attended the activity.

Qatar is home to the largest population of dugongs outside of Australia. As mammals with a low reproductive output, dugongs are listed as vulnerable to extinction by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. In Qatar, they face challenges due to incidental fishing, habitat degradation, and other threats.
Full story: http://www.menafn.com/1094455229/Workshop-helps-tackle-threats-to-dugongs

Related articles:
http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/360580/human-activities-threaten-local-dugongs

CONFERENCES

The 13th International Coral Reef Symposium (ICRS) (Hawai'i, 19–24 June 2016)

Theme: Bridging Science to Policy.
The world's major coral reef science meeting, the International Coral Reef Symposium (ICRS), is held every four years. It is the primary international meeting focused on coral reef science and management. The Symposium will bring together an anticipated 2,500 coral reef scientists, policy makers and managers from 70 different nations in a forum to present the latest research findings, case histories and management activities, and to discuss the application of scientific knowledge to achieving coral reef sustainability. ICRS2016 will include a Taxon-specific session on seagrass: Session H, 26 - Integrating seagrass science and management in a coral reef framework

Key Dates
15 January 2016 – Abstract Submission and Early Registration Close
February 2016 - Authors Notified of Acceptance
March 2016 - Session Schedule Posted and Presenters Notified of Session Assignments
April 2016 - Full Scientific Program Schedule Posted
16 May 2016 - Registration Cancellation Deadline (Last Day to Receive a Refund)
19-24 June 2016 - Meeting

for more information, visit http://sgmeet.com/icrs2016/default.asp

The 12th International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW12) (Wales, 17-23 October 2016)

Theme: Declining seagrasses in a changing world.

The International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW) is the only international meeting specifically tailored to seagrass scientists, professionals and students. The International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW) provides a good opportunity for the scientists working on various aspects of seagrass ecosystems to come together and discuss their latest findings. The ISBW12 will be held from 17-23 October 2016 at Nant Gwytheyrn, Gwynedd, Wales, organized by Project Seagrass and the Seagrass Ecosystems Research Group. The conference email address is ISBW2016@projectseagrass.org.

We as scientists know the devastating effects that humanity is having on our worlds seagrass meadows. Although much work is needed to keep documenting, understanding and highlighting the problems facing seagrass we as a research community need to also provide a voice of optimism about how we can make changes to ensure survival of these precious ecosystems. We must go beyond science, and use it to inform policy and management, and ultimately to catalyze change. We know that there are many examples of this, from stakeholder led management and successful restoration to improvements in water quality and the management of boating activities. We encourage participants to contribute stories of seagrass conservation success in order to strengthen this theme. We also encourage submission of research stories that aim to provide evidence to make future successes.

Let's make ISBW12 a conference that celebrates seagrasses and has a spirit of #oceanoptimism
The workshop therefore has 4 key themes that will form the structure of the sessions held throughout the week. These are:

- Resilience and a changing environment
- Ecosystem services
- Restoration and management
- Raising the profile of seagrass meadows

for more information, visit http://isbw12.org/

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 39,692 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 Richard Unsworth and *notes from the field* by Dr 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*

Virtual Herbarium *http://www.seagrasswatch.org/herbarium.html*

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 housed by TropWATER (James Cook University) and supported by private donations.

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