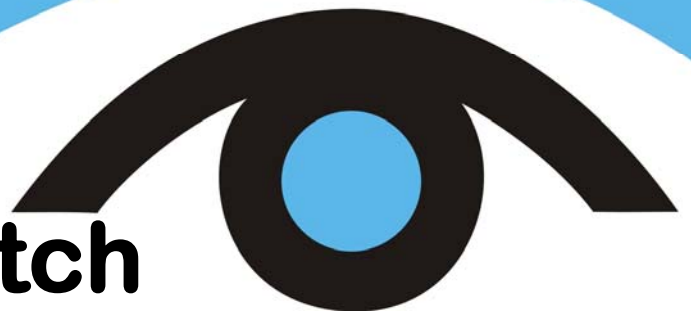


Seagrass-Watch

Proceedings of a workshop for monitoring
seagrass habitats in the Kimberley region,
Western Australia

*Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW) - Broome Work Centre
Broome, Western Australia
19-20 October 2013*

Len McKenzie & Rudi Yoshida



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Department of
Parks and Wildlife



Save the Nature of the Kimberley
environs
KIMBERLEY
INC



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Overview

Seagrass-Watch is a participatory monitoring program developed in 1998 to provide an early warning of coastal ecological decline. Anyone can participate in Seagrass-Watch, as it responds to local needs. Program participants include scientists, environment rangers and volunteers (e.g., local residents, indigenous groups, tertiary institutions, non-government organisations). Seagrass-Watch is a monitoring program that brings people together for seagrass conservation. Participants range in ages from 18 to 68 and represent a diverse cross-section of the community, including tradespeople, engineers, school teachers, fishers, divers, retirees, university students, biologists and ecologists. Many are involved with local environmental groups and have a keen interest in conservation and environmental issues.

Seagrass-Watch is a global scientific, non-destructive, seagrass assessment and monitoring program. It identifies areas important for seagrass species diversity and conservation. The information collected can be used to assist the management of coastal environments and to prevent significant areas and species being lost.

Monitoring seagrass resources is important for two reasons: it is a valuable tool for improving management practices; and it allows us to know whether resource status and condition is stable, improving or declining. Successful management of coastal environments (*including seagrass resources*) requires regular monitoring of the status and condition of natural resources.

Early detection of change allows coastal management agencies to adjust their management practices and/or take remedial action sooner for more successful results. Monitoring is important in improving our understanding of seagrass resources and to coastal management agencies for:

- *exposing coastal environmental problems before they become intractable,*
- *developing benchmarks against which performance and effectiveness can be measured,*
- *identifying and prioritising future requirements and initiatives,*
- *determining the effectiveness of management practices being applied,*
- *maintaining consistent records so that comparisons can be made over time,*
- *developing within the community a better understanding of coastal issues,*
- *developing a better understanding of cause and effect in land/catchment management practices,*
- *assisting education and training, and helping to develop links between local communities, schools and government agencies, and*
- *assessing new management practices.*

Seagrass-Watch monitoring efforts are vital to assist with tracking global patterns in seagrass health, and assess the human impacts on seagrass meadows, which have the potential to destroy or degrade these coastal ecosystems and decrease their yield of natural resources. Responsive management based on adequate information will help to prevent any further significant areas and species being lost. To protect the valuable seagrass meadows along our coasts, everyone must work together.

The goals of the Seagrass-Watch program are:

- *to educate the wider community on the importance of seagrass resources*
- *to raise awareness of coastal management issues*
- *to build the capacity of local stakeholders in the use of standardised scientific methodologies*
- *to conduct long-term monitoring of seagrass & coastal habitat condition*
- *to provide an early warning system of coastal environment changes for management*
- *to support conservation measures which ensure the long-term resilience of seagrass ecosystems.*

This workshop is jointly hosted by Environs Kimberley and the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW), with local coordination by Kylie Weatherall and Fiona West (Broome Community Seagrass Monitoring Project) and supported by *Coast2Reef* etc and Seagrass-Watch HQ. This workshop is for experienced participants who plan to lead seagrass monitoring at a site/location or conduct seagrass extension activities. As part of the Level 1 workshop we will:

- *study seagrass biology;*
- *learn seagrass taxonomy;*
- *discuss the present knowledge of seagrass ecology, including importance and threats;*
- *gain knowledge of monitoring;*
- *learn about the Seagrass-Watch program and techniques for monitoring seagrass resources; and*
- *become skilled at conducting a Seagrass-Watch field monitoring event.*

The following information is provided as a training guide and a reference for future Seagrass-Watch monitoring activities. For further information, please do not hesitate to contact us at

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Photo: Fergus Kennedy

Workshop leaders



Len McKenzie

Len is a Principal Researcher with TropWATER (James Cook University) and Seagrass-Watch Program Leader. He is also the Task Leader of the Reef Rescue Marine Monitoring Program – Inshore Seagrass Monitoring and project leader for a series of projects involving the assessment and sustainable use of coastal habitats. Len has over 25 years experience as a researcher on seagrass ecology, assessment and fisheries habitats. This includes experience within Australia and internationally in seagrass research, resource mapping/ assessment and biodiversity. He has provided information on seagrass communities that has been vital in management of seagrass resources of the Great Barrier Reef and at the state, national and international levels. He has also advised on fisheries and coastal resource-use issues for managers, fishing organisations, conservation and community groups. Len is a qualified trainer and assessor (TAE40110). Len is also the Secretary of the World Seagrass Association.

Current Projects

- Seagrass-Watch
- Status and mapping of seagrass resources in Queensland
- Identification of indicators and thresholds of concern for water quality and ecosystem health on a bioregional scale for the Great Barrier Reef
- Seagrass resilience: seagrass connectivity, community composition and growth
- Investigations on the macrofauna associated with seagrass meadows
- Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Protection Plan – Reef Rescue Marine Monitoring Program: inshore seagrass



Rudi Yoshida

Rudi is a Research Officer with TropWATER (James Cook University). Rudi has over 15 years experience in seagrass related research and monitoring. He is also a core member of Seagrass-Watch HQ, and ensures data submitted is managed and QA/QC protocols applied. He is also responsible for maintenance of the Seagrass-Watch website.

Current Projects

- Seagrass-Watch
- Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Protection Plan – Reef Rescue Marine Monitoring Program: inshore seagrass

Agenda - Level 1 (*basic*)

Saturday 19th October 2013 (DPaW, Broome Work Centre)

0900 - 0915 (15min)	Welcome & Introduction
0915 - 0935 (20min)	Seagrass Biology and Taxonomy*
0935 - 1015 (40min)	Seagrass Identification
1015 - 1030 (15min)	<i>Break</i>
1030 - 1130 (60min)	Seagrass Identification <i>continued</i> *
1130 - 1230 (60min)	Seagrass Biology 2 and Ecology
1230 - 1315 (45min)	<i>Lunch</i>
1315 - 1345 (30min)	Seagrass importance
1345 - 1430 (45min)	Seagrass threats*
1430 - 1445 (15min)	Wrap up for day

Sunday 20th October 2013 (DPaW & Town Beach)

1030 - 1045 (15min)	Seagrass monitoring*
1045 - 1145 (60min)	Seagrass-Watch: how to sample*
1145 - 1245 (60min)	Seagrass-Watch: QAQC & how data is used*
1245 - 1300 (15min)	Risk assessment
1300 - 1500 (2hrs)	<i>Lunch & relocated to field site</i>
1500 - 1700 (2hrs)	Field exercise: Seagrass-Watch monitoring

Where: Town Beach (RO1)

- *meet at Town Beach car park*
- *be punctual*

What to bring:

- *hat, sunscreen (Slip! Slop! Slap!)*
- *dive booties or old shoes that can get wet*
- *wear long pants, but keep clothes light and breathable*
- *drink/refreshments and energising snack*
- *wet weather gear: poncho/raincoat*
- *insect repellent*
- *polaroid sunglasses (not essential)*
- *simple medical kit in case of injuries to yourself*
- *change of footwear and clothes*
- *enthusiasm*

You will be walking across a seagrass meadow exposed with the tide, through shallow water. It may be wet and muddy!

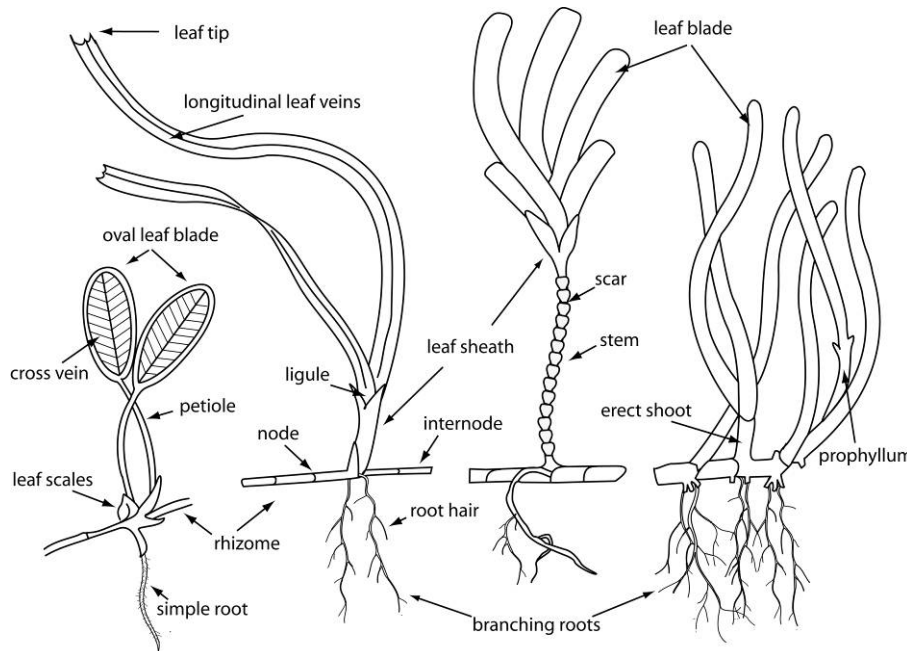
Please remember, seagrass meadows are an important resource. We ask that you use discretion when working/walking on them.

1700 - 1730 (30min)	Wrap up
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Tide: 1734, 1.3m

Background

Seagrasses are unique flowering plants that have evolved to live in sea water. Seagrasses belong to a group of plants known as **angiosperms** (flowering plants).



Composite illustration demonstrating morphological features used to distinguish main seagrass taxonomic groups.

Various common names are applied to seagrass species, such as turtle grass, eelgrass, tape grass, spoon grass and shoal grass. These names are not consistently applied across countries.

Like terrestrial (land living) plants, a seagrass can be divided into its leaves (which contain veins), stem, roots (buried in the substrate) and reproductive parts such as flowers and fruits. Algae do not have veins in their leaves nor do they possess roots (anchoring to the surface of the substrate by a holdfast) or produce flowers or seeds.

They are called “seagrass” because most have ribbon-like, grassy leaves. There are many different kinds of seagrasses and some do not look like grass at all. Seagrass range from the size of your fingernail to plants with leaves as long as 7 metres. Some of the shapes and sizes of leaves of different species of seagrass include an oval (paddle or clover) shape, a fern shape, a long spaghetti like leaf and a ribbon shape. Species that have a paddle or fern shaped leaf are called *Halophila*. Ones that have a ribbon shaped leaf are the *Cymodocea*, *Thalassia*, *Thalassodendron*, *Halodule* and *Zostera*. Spaghetti-like seagrass is called *Syringodium*. At the base of a leaf is a sheath, which protects young leaves. At the other end of a leaf is the tip, which can be rounded or pointed. The vertical stem, found in some species, is the upright axis of the plant from which leaves arise (attach). The **remnants of leaf attachment** are seen as **scars**.

Seagrass leaves lack stomata (microscopic pores on the under side of leaves) but have thin cuticle to allow gas and nutrient exchange. They also possess large thin-walled aerenchyma (air channels). Aerenchyma are specialised tissue having a regular arrangement of air spaces, called lacunae, that both provide buoyancy to the leaves and facilitate gas exchange throughout the

Seagrass are marine flowering plants

Seagrasses have roots, stems and leaves

Seagrass is different to seaweed (algae) as seagrass have internal veins, true roots and produce flowers, fruits and seeds

Leaves of different seagrass species can be shaped like a flattened ribbon, look like a fern, round like a clover, or even spaghetti shaped

Seagrass have veins and air channels in their leaves and stems so they can carry water, food and absorb gases

plant. Leaves have a very thin cuticle, which allows gas and some nutrient diffusion into them from the surrounding water. Seagrass leaves also contain **veins** (lignified conducting tissue that **transports food, nutrients and water around the plant**) (i.e. **an internal vascular system**). Veins can be across the leaf blade or run parallel to the leaf edge. Also within the leaves are chloroplasts, which use the sun's light to convert carbon dioxide and water into oxygen and sugar (photosynthesis). The sugar and oxygen are then available for use by other living organisms.

The roots and horizontal stems (**rhizomes**) of seagrass are often buried in sand or mud. They **anchor the plant, store carbohydrates and absorb nutrients**. Roots can be simple or branching and all have fine hairs to help absorb nutrients. Rhizomes are formed in segments with leaves or vertical stems rising from the joints, called **nodes** or scars. Sections between the nodes are called internodes. Seagrasses depend upon the growth of rhizomes to increase the area they occupy. This vegetative growth is the most common mode of growth for seagrasses. Although the rhizome mainly runs horizontally, some lateral branches are more or less erect and bear leaves (erect shoots). Sometimes the leaves are on a special type of stalk, called a petiole.

The roots and rhizomes of seagrasses are well endowed with aerenchyma and the lacunae are extensive and continuous with leaf tissues. **Oxygen** transport to the roots creates an oxic environment around the roots, facilitating nutrient uptake.

Seagrasses have flowers and pollination systems that are well adapted for pollination by water. **Seagrass form tiny flowers, fruits and seeds**. Most seagrasses have separate male and female plants. In most species, flowers are small, white and are borne at the base of the leaf clusters. The stamens (male parts) and pistils (female parts) extend above the petals to facilitate pollen release and pollination respectively.

Most seagrasses reproduce by pollination while submerged and complete their entire life cycle underwater. Pollination in seagrasses is hydrophilic (aided by water), and can occur by: (i) pollen transported above water surface (e.g., *Enhalus*); (ii) pollen transported on water surface (e.g., *Halodule*), or; (iii) pollen transported beneath water surface (e.g., *Thalassia*).

Seagrass pollen grains are elongated into a filamentous shape. The filamentous nature of pollen grains facilitates transport within the water medium, **mainly by water currents**. *Halophila* and *Thalassia* have spherical pollen grains, but they remain joined together in long chains, giving the same effect as having elongated, filamentous pollen grains.

After fertilization, the ovary of the female flower develops into a fruit. In seagrasses, fruit development and fruit structure are as diversified as their flowering patterns and floral structures. In general the seeds, ranging in the size from 0.3 to 0.5mm in some *Halophila* species to more than 1–2 cm in *Enhalus*, are furnished with a nutrition reserve and sink rather than float. The **number of seeds within a fruit also varies from 1 (e.g. *Halodule uninervis*) up to 25 (e.g. *Halophila ovalis*)**.

Seagrass taxonomy

Seagrasses are monocotyledons that are not true grasses (true grasses belong to the family Poaceae), but are rather more closely related to the lily family.

Seagrasses rely on light to convert carbon dioxide and water into oxygen and sugar (photosynthesis)

Roots can be simple or branching and all have fine hairs to help absorb nutrients

Seagrass pump oxygen into the sediment via their roots

Seagrass have flowers, fruits and seeds

Pollination occurs in the water

Pollen from male seagrass flowers is mainly dispersed to female seagrass flowers by tidal currents

Seagrasses are not true grasses

Seagrasses are more



Seagrasses evolved approximately **100 million years ago** from land plants that returned to the sea in at least three separate lineages or families. Thus, seagrasses are not a taxonomically unified group but a 'biological' or 'ecological' group. The evolutionary adaptations required for survival in the marine environment have led to convergence (similarity) in morphology.

Worldwide, there are about 12 major divisions, consisting of approximately 60 species (possibly up to 72) of seagrass. The highest concentration of species occurs in the Indo-West Pacific region.

Over 30 species can be found within Australian waters. The most diverse seagrass communities are in the waters of north-eastern Queensland and southern Western Australia. Various common names are applied to seagrass species, such as turtle grass, eelgrass, tape grass, and spoon grass. Seagrasses are not seaweeds. Seaweed is the common name for algae.

Seagrass requirements for growth

Seagrasses require light, nutrients, carbon dioxide, substrate for anchoring, tolerable salinity, temperature and pH to survive. The requirements for a seagrass to be able to exist in the marine environment include:

1. adaptation to life in saline (salty) medium
2. growth when completely submerged
3. anchoring system able to withstand the forces of wave action and tidal currents
4. hydrophilous pollination (pollination aided by water).

The need for physiological adaptations to life in sea water is obvious when one considers that seagrasses evolved from land plants, and most land plants are unable to tolerate even small quantities of salt. In contrast to land plants, some seagrasses can tolerate a salinity range from 4 to 65 parts per thousand (2x seawater concentration). Typically, seagrasses grow best in salinities of 35 parts per thousand. Not all species tolerate all salinities equally well, and salinity tolerance may be a factor promoting different species distributions along salinity gradients, e.g., going up estuaries. Some seagrasses can survive in a range of conditions encompassing fresh water, estuarine, marine, or hypersaline (very salty). A limiting factor for many intertidal seagrasses is osmotic impacts resulting from hypersalinity due to evaporation

Seagrasses being plants need light for photosynthesis. Light availability is the most dominant overriding factor in seagrass growth. Seagrasses have high minimum light requirements (e.g. 10-20% on average, 4.4% minimum and 29% maximum depending on species) of surface irradiance) because: (i) they have a high respiratory demand to support a large non-photosynthetic biomass (e.g. roots, rhizomes); (ii) they lack certain pigments and therefore can utilise only a restricted spectral range; and (iii) they must regularly oxygenate their root zone to compensate for anoxic sediment. However, light in the intertidal can be in excess of requirements and excess light can cause temporary photo damage. UV exposure can also have significant impacts on seagrasses.

Temperature influences the rate of growth and the health of plants, particularly at the extremes. As water temperatures increase (up to 38°C) the rate of photorespiration increases reducing the efficiency of photosynthesis at a given CO₂ concentration. The cause of thermal stress at higher temperatures (38°C to 42°C) is the disruption of electron transport

closely related to lilies

Seagrass evolved 100 million years ago from land plants that returned to the sea

There are around 60 species of seagrass found in oceans throughout the world

Seagrasses need plenty of sun and clean water to grow.

Seagrasses are physiologically adapted to life in sea water

Seagrasses can tolerate a range of salinities. Some species are less tolerant than others

Light availability is the most important factor determining seagrass growth

Seagrasses require between 10-20% of surface light to grow

Water temperature influences the rate of growth and the health of seagrass

Seawater

activity via inactivation of the oxygen producing enzymes (proteins) of photosystem II. Above these temperatures many proteins are simply destroyed in most plants, resulting in plant death.

Temperature also controls the range of pH and dissolved carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentrations in the water column; factors critical in plant survival in the marine environment.

Seagrasses require inorganic carbon for growth. They uptake inorganic carbon at the leaf surface via two pathways which are species-specific. Some species use bicarbonate (HCO₃⁻) as an inorganic carbon source (e.g. *Halophila ovalis*, *Cymodocea rotundata*, *Syringodium isoetifolium* and *Thalassia*), whereas others use enzymes to make CO₂ available as the inorganic carbon source (e.g. *Enhalus acoroides*, *Halodule*, *Cymodocea serrulata*).

Seagrasses require two key nutrients, nitrogen and phosphorous, for growth. In the coastal regions, seagrasses appear to be primarily limited by nitrogen and secondarily by phosphorus. The demand for nutrients by seagrasses appears to be seasonally dependent. During the growing season the demand for nutrients is high, however during the senescent season elevated nutrients may become toxic.

The availability of nutrients to seagrasses may also be dependent on sediment quality / geochemistry. Bioavailability of nutrients is dependent on particle size and type. For example, clay content influences sediment adsorptive capacity — the more clays the greater the adsorptive capacity — and, calcium carbonate binds phosphorus, limiting its bioavailability.

Sediment quality, depth and mobility are important factors for seagrass composition, growth and persistence. Most seagrasses live in sand or mud substrates where their roots and rhizomes anchor the plants to the sea floor. Some seagrasses such as *Cymodocea* spp. prefer deeper sediments while others can tolerate a broad range of sediment depths. Colonising seagrasses such as *Halophila* spp. and *Halodule uninervis* are better suited to mobile sediments than larger species. The biogeochemical characteristics of sediment that can affect the nutrient content/binding capacity, organic content and oxygen levels. Seagrasses are unable to grow in sediments of high organic content.

Currents and hydrodynamic processes affect almost all biological, geological and chemical processes in seagrass ecosystems at scales from the smallest (physiological and molecular) to the largest (meadow wide). The pollination of seagrass flowers depends on currents and without current flows, vegetative material and seeds will not be transported to new areas, and species will not be exchanged between meadows. Factors such as the photosynthetic rate of seagrasses depend on the thickness of the diffusive boundary layer that is determined by current flow, as is the sedimentation rate. Both influence growth rates of seagrass, survival of seagrass species and overall meadow morphology.

Where are seagrasses found?

Seagrasses are found in oceans throughout the world. They occur in tropical (hot), temperate (cool) and the edge of the arctic (freezing) regions. Seagrass are mainly found in bays, estuaries and coastal waters from the mid-intertidal (shallow) region down to depths of 50 or 60 metres. Most species are found in clear shallow inshore areas [between mean sea-level and 25 metres depth](#).

temperatures above 40°C will stress tropical seagrass. Death occurs at temperatures above 43°C

Seagrass require inorganic carbon for growth

Seagrass uptake carbon via two different pathways

Seagrass require two key nutrients, nitrogen and phosphorous, for growth

Nutrient availability to seagrass is dependent on the type of sediment they grow in

Most seagrass live in sand or mud sediments

Sediment movement can determine the presence of seagrass species

Tidal currents are important for pollination and exchange of gases from the water to the plant

Seagrass are commonly found in estuaries, shallow coastal locations, and on reef-tops.

Seagrass are mainly found in clear

Seagrasses survive in the intertidal zone especially in locations sheltered from wave action or where there is pooling of water at low tide, (e.g., reef platforms and tide pools), which protects seagrass from elevated temperatures and drying.

Seagrasses inhabit all types of ground (substrates), from mud to rock. The most extensive seagrass meadows occur on soft substrates like sand and mud.

The depth range of seagrass is most likely to be controlled at its deepest edge by the availability of light for photosynthesis. Exposure at low tide, wave action and associated turbidity and low salinity from fresh water inflow determines seagrass species survival at the shallow edge.

Seagrass plants form small patches that develop into large continuous meadows. These meadows may consist of one or many species: sometimes up to 12 species present within one location.

How are seagrasses important to the marine ecosystem?

Seagrass communities are one of the most productive and dynamic ecosystems globally. Seagrasses may significantly influence the physical, chemical and biological environments in which they grow by acting as 'ecological engineers'. They provide habitats and nursery grounds for many marine animals and act as substrate stabilisers.

Seagrass meadows are highly productive. They have been documented to create habitat complexity compared with unvegetated areas, providing up to 27 times more habitable substrate, as well as providing refuge and food for a range of animals. About 40 times more animals occur in seagrass meadows than on bare sand.

One of the most important roles of seagrasses is providing a nursery and shelter area for fish and prawns which are valuable to fisheries. Juveniles of some important species which depend on seagrass meadows include fish such as perch, mullet, whiting, tailor, bream, snappers, emperors and sweetlips. Commercial penaeid prawns such as red spot king, brown tiger, grooved tiger and endeavour also live in seagrass meadows as juveniles. Tropical rock lobsters also live in seagrass meadows as juveniles. Shellfish such as some oysters and pearl shell may be more likely to settle and survive where there is seagrass. Juvenile and adult sandcrabs and flathead are just two species which spend most of their lives in seagrass meadows, where there is not only food but also protection from strong tidal currents and predators. Larger predatory animals such as herons, cormorants, sharks, barramundi, salmon, crocodiles, etc, are also attracted to the seagrass meadows by the schools of forage fish which seek shelter there.

Seagrass meadows are a major food source for a number of grazing animals and are considered very productive pastures of the sea. The dugong (*Dugong dugon*) and the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) mainly feed on seagrass. An adult green turtle eats about **two kilograms** of seagrass a day while an adult dugong eats about 28 to 40 kilograms a day. Although dugongs and turtles will feed on any seagrass species within their range, if a range of species is available, they select seagrass species for food which are high nitrogen, high starch and low fibre. For example, the order of seagrass species preference for dugongs is *Halophila ovalis* > *Halodule uninervis* > *Syringodium isoetifolium*. In sub-tropical and temperate areas, water birds such as black swans also eat seagrass.

shallow inshore areas between mean sea-level and 25 metres depth.

The depth that seagrass are found underwater depends on the light availability (water clarity)

Seagrass plants form small patches that develop into large meadows

Seagrasses are important habitat and feeding grounds for marine organisms.

About 40 times more animals occur in seagrass meadows than on bare sand.

Seagrasses are important nursery grounds for fish, and they support many human commercial activities.

Dugongs can eat up to 40kg of seagrass per day.

Dugongs and turtles select seagrass species for food which are high nitrogen, high starch and low fibre

Seagrasses also contribute to the

Decomposing seagrasses provide food for benthic (bottom-dwelling) aquatic life. The decaying leaves are broken down by fungi and bacteria which in turn provide food for other microorganisms such as flagellates and plankton. Microorganisms provide food for the juveniles of many species of marine animals such as fish, crabs, prawns and molluscs.

The rhizomes and roots of the grasses bind sediments on the substrate, where nutrients are recycled by microorganisms back into the marine ecosystem. The leaves of the grasses slow water flow, allowing suspended material to settle on the bottom. This increases the amount of light reaching the seagrass meadow and creates a calm habitat for many species.

Seagrasses are nutrient sinks, buffering or filtering nutrient and chemical inputs to the marine environment. Seagrasses uptake nitrogen and phosphorus from coastal run-off that, in overabundance, can lead to algal blooms that can impair water quality.

Interactions with mangroves and coral reefs

Tropical seagrasses are important in their interactions with mangroves and coral reefs. All these systems exert a stabilizing effect on the environment, resulting in important physical and biological support for the other communities).

Barrier reefs protect coastlines, and the lagoon formed between the reef and the mainland is protected from waves, allowing mangrove and seagrass communities to develop. Seagrasses trap sediment and slow water movement, causing suspended sediment to fall out. This trapping of sediment benefits coral by reducing sediment loads in the water.

Mangroves trap sediment from the land, reducing the chance of seagrasses and corals being smothered. Sediment banks accumulated by seagrasses may eventually form substrate that can be colonized by mangroves. All three communities trap and hold nutrients from being dispersed and lost into the surrounding oceanic waters.

The value of seagrasses

The value of ecosystem services is a very controversial topic in today's literature. Ecosystem Services are the processes by which the environment produces resources that we often take for granted. For seagrasses it is services such as clean water, preventing erosion, and habitat for fisheries. The economic values of seagrass meadows are very large, although not always easy to quantify. Seagrass meadows are rated the 3rd most valuable ecosystem globally (on a per hectare basis), only preceded by estuaries and wetlands. The average global value of seagrasses for their nutrient cycling services and the raw product they provide has been estimated at 1994 US\$ 19,004 ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹.

What causes seagrass areas to change?

Tropical seagrass meadows vary seasonally and between years, and the potential for widespread seagrass loss has been well documented.

Factors which affect the distribution of seagrass meadows are sunlight and nutrient levels, water depth, turbidity, salinity, temperature, current and wave action.

Seagrasses respond to natural variations in light availability, nutrient and trace element (iron) availability, grazing pressure, disease, weather patterns, and

productivity of ecosystems via the detrital food pathway

Seagrass binds sediments and help prevent erosion

Seagrasses slow water flow and increase water clarity

Seagrass help remove harmful nutrient and sediment pollution from coastal waters

Seagrasses, mangroves and coral reef interact, providing physical and biological support for other communities

Seagrass meadows are rated the 3rd most valuable ecosystem globally (more valuable than mangroves or coral reefs)

Seagrasses can change due to both natural and human impacts

episodic floods and cyclones. The dynamic nature of seagrass meadows in response to natural environmental variation complicates the identification of changes caused by humans.

What threatens seagrass?

Seagrass meadows can be easily damaged. Approximately 58% of seagrass meadows globally, have lost part of their distribution. According to reports, the documented losses in seagrass meadows globally since 1980 are equivalent to two football fields per hour.

Some losses are natural due to storms and herbivores, however most losses are the result of human activities. Human pollution has contributed most to seagrass declines around the world.

The most widespread and pervasive cause of seagrass decline is a reduction in available light. Processes that reduce light penetration to seagrasses include pulsed turbidity events during floods, enhanced suspended sediment loads and elevated nutrient concentrations. Poor farming practices can result in excess sediments and fertilizers washing down creeks to the sea. Sewage discharge and stormwater runoff from urban development can elevate nutrients in coastal areas. Boating activity may also stir up sediment, reducing light levels. Phytoplankton and fast-growing macroalgae are also better competitors for light than benthic plants and their biomass can shade seagrasses during progressive eutrophication.

Oil and trace metal contamination can exert direct toxic effects on some seagrass species. Seagrasses are able to bioaccumulate the trace metals and this can have ramifications for grazers such as dugongs.

People can also physically damage or destroy seagrass. Coastal development for boat marinas, shipping ports and housing generally occurs on the coast in areas which are sheltered and seagrass like to grow. Seagrass meadows are either removed or buried by these activities. Coastal developments can also cause changes in water movement. Dredging boat channels to provide access to these developments not only physically removes plants, but can make the water muddy and dump sediment on seagrass. Litter and rubbish can also wash into the sea if not properly disposed. Rubbish can physically and chemically damage seagrass meadows and the animals that live within them.

Boating and fishing activities can physically impact or destroy seagrasses. Boat anchors and their chains can dig into seagrass. Propellers can cut into seagrass meadows and unbalance the rhizome mat. Storms can further exacerbate the damage by the physical force of waves and currents ripping up large sections of the rhizome mat. Uncontrolled digging for bait worm can also physically damage seagrasses and some introduced marine pests and pathogens also have the potential to damage seagrass meadows.

One of the other significant impacts to seagrass is climate change. The major vulnerability of seagrass to climate change is loss of seagrass in the coastal zone, particularly near river mouths and in shallow areas. The greatest impact is expected to result from elevated temperatures, particularly in shallower habitats where seagrasses grow (e.g., affecting distribution and reproduction). In addition, reduced light penetration from sediment deposition and resuspension are expected due to more intensive cyclones/hurricanes and elevated flooding frequency and amplitude. This will result in even greater seagrass losses, and changes in species composition are expected to occur particularly in relation to disturbance

People can damage or destroy seagrass by pollution (sewage, oil spills and coastal runoff) and physical destruction (dredging, bait & clam digging, boat propellers and anchors/moorings).

Poor farming practices can result in runoff which can damage seagrass by elevating nutrients, reducing available light and releasing herbicides.

Coastal development can have a major impact on seagrass meadows

Climate change can threaten intertidal seagrass by increased seawater temperature and greater physical disturbance from storms

and recolonisation. Following such events, a shift to more ephemeral species and those with lower minimum light requirements is expected.

Please note: citations have been removed for ease of reading. Please see *References & Further Reading* for source/citations on scientific facts.



Notes:

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Interesting facts:

Over a billion people live within 50 km of a seagrass meadow. Millions of people obtain their protein from animals that live in seagrasses.

The estimated global coverage of seagrass is between 300,000 and 600,000 square kilometres.

A hectare of seagrass absorbs 1.2 kilograms of nutrients per year, equivalent to the treated effluent from 200 people.

In northern Australia, whole seagrass meadows are able to completely replace their leaves (turnover) in around 14 days during the growing season.

A hectare of seagrass sequesters 830 kilograms of carbon per year, equivalent to the CO₂ emissions from an automobile travelling 3,350 km.

One square metre of seagrass can produce up to 10 litres of oxygen per day

In northern Australia, the primary productivity of seagrass meadows is higher than a mangrove forest, a terrestrial forest or grassland.

Seagrasses occupy only 0.1% of the seafloor, yet are responsible for 12% of the organic carbon buried in the ocean, which helps reduce greenhouse gases.

The only endangered marine plant is a species of seagrass (*Halophila johnsonii* in Florida).

There is a single clone of seagrass that is over 6,000 years old (*Posidonia oceanica* in the Mediterranean Sea). It is possibly the world's oldest plant!

The deepest growing seagrass (*Halophila decipiens*), 86 metres, was reported from Cargados Carajos Shoals in the Indian Ocean northeast of Mauritius.

Seagrass produce the longest pollen grains on the planet.

Some intertidal species of seagrasses can lose up to 50% per cent of their water content and still survive.

Did you know that Australia has the highest number of seagrass species of any continent in the world?

In Alaska, seagrasses remain frozen and in a dormant state over winter and do not start to grow again until the thaw.

The longest known seagrass 7.3 metres in length has been reported from Funakoshi Bay, Japan.

40,000 seeds of *Halodule uninervis* have been found in 1 square metre of mudflat.

In Florida, 80% of the above ground seagrass biomass is consumed by parrot fish.

The anchor and chain from one cruise boat can destroy an area of seagrass the size of a football field!

Seagrass in the Kimberley region of Western Australia

Updated from McKenzie, 2007a

The Kimberley region of Western Australia extends from the border with the Northern Territory in the north to Sandy Point (Roebuck Bay) in the south. The marine ecosystems are characterised within the North-West Marine Bioregion Anon, 2008. Seagrasses are a significant component in the coastal marine ecosystems Walker, 1995; Wells et al., 1995; Walker et al., 1996; Walker, 1997 and their contribution to the total primary carbon production is critical to regionally important dugong and turtle populations.

The Kimberley coast displays wide variation and is a significant component of the region's physical setting. It is a typical drowned river valley system, with wide sandy beaches which give way to mudflats. Embayments and sounds grade shorewards into mangrove lined tidal flats. Mangrove inlets and tidal creeks are interspersed with coastal cliffs. Some embayments such as Cambridge Gulf and King Sound extend well inland. There are numerous offshore islands and much of the coast remains uninhabited.

The Kimberley coast region of Western Australia has both arid and wet tropical environments (annual average rainfall <200 mm and >1000 mm respectively). The marine environment is influenced by the warm, south-equatorial current that flows from the east through the south east Asian and northern Australian region. The coast is prone to large tidal variation from <1 to 11m Walker and Prince, 1987. In King Sound, the highest tides reach 11m. Strong tidal flows, together with summer river discharges, dramatically influence the coastal environment.

Western Australia has the highest diversity of seagrasses in the world, with 25 species represented Walker and Prince, 1987; Kirkman, 1997; Walker, 2003. These are generally divided into temperate and tropical distributions, with Shark Bay representing the biogeographical overlap. 12 species are represented in the tropics (*Thalassia hemprichii*, *Thalassodendron ciliatum*, *Enhalus acoroides*, *Halophila ovalis*, *Halodule uninervis*, *Halophila minor* (revised from *H. ovata*¹), *Cymodocea angustata*, *Syringodium isoetifolium*, *Cymodocea serrulata*, *Halophila spinulosa*, *Halodule pinifolia* and *Halophila decipiens*), one of which is endemic (*Cymodocea angustata*) Kirkman, 1997; Walker, 2003.

Seagrass distribution throughout the region is most likely influenced by shelter, sediment characteristics, water turbidity and tidal exposure. Seagrass meadows are mostly found in the sheltered bays along the southern mainland coast. Extensive terracing of these expanses of the intertidal zone often result in seagrass high in the intertidal Walker, 2003. The majority of the meadows are low to moderate in abundance, and are dominated by *Halophila* and *Halodule* species. Seagrasses either occur sparsely in coral reef environments or can attain high biomasses on mudbanks or within high intertidal lagoons, where water is ponded during the falling tide. The environments are otherwise too extreme (tidal movement/ turbidity/ freshwater runoff in the wet season) for seagrass survival Dennison and Kirkman, 1996. Subtidal populations of seagrasses are poorly known, but it appears that the northern Kimberley does not have the seagrass richness recorded for the southern Kimberley.

¹ *Halophila minor* was originally reported as *H. ovata*, however taxonomists now regard *H. ovata* in the Indo-western Pacific as only present in the South China Sea and Micronesia (Kuo, J. (2000). Taxonomic notes on *Halophila minor* and *H. ovata*. *Biol. Mar. Medit.* **7**, 79-82.).

Roebuck Bay

Roebuck Bay is a tropical marine embayment with extensive, highly biologically diverse, intertidal mudflats. The Bay is bounded to the north-west by the township of Broome (population 15,386 in 2008) and extends to Sandy Point in the south. Declared a Ramsar site, it is internationally important for at least 20 species of migratory shorebirds and one of the most important sites for shorebird conservation in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway in Australia and globally. Dugongs (*Dugong dugon*) and Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) regularly use the bay as a feeding area and as a transit area on migration. The Bay is also a major nursery area for marine fishes and crustaceans, and supports an exceptionally high biomass and diversity of benthic invertebrates (estimated to be between 300 – 500 species), placing it amongst the most diverse mudflats known in the world de Goeij et al., 2003.

Roebuck Bay has a very large tidal range which exposes around 160 km² of mudflat, approximately 45% of the total bay area, with tides travelling at up to 20cm/sec mid cycle Hickey et al., 1998; Piersma et al., 2002. Most of the mudflat area is inundated by each high tide and at times, spring tides and/or cyclones may cause the adjoining coastal flats to become inundated. The tidal system is semi-diurnal with an average tidal amplitude of 5.7m. Tidal range varies from c. 1 m on neap tides to 10.5 m on the highest spring tides. These factors dominate the intertidal ecology.

Extensive seagrass meadows occur in the northern regions of Roebuck Bay, particularly in the Town Beach area, and are dominated by *Halophila ovalis* and *Halodule uninervis* (www.seagrasswatch.org). The most vigorous stands of seagrass grow in areas that are exposed for less than two hours at low tide Prince, 1986. *Halophila minor* occurs sparsely by itself, often in pools which remain in the high intertidal during low tides, or with some *H. uninervis* Prince, 1986. *Halodule pinifolia* has also been reported from northern Roebuck Bay, but mixed with other species Walker and Prince, 1987.



Mixed *Halophila ovalis* and *Halodule uninervis* meadow adjacent to Mangrove Point inner anchorage area, Roebuck Bay - 01 August 1984 (tide 0.3m). Photos: R Prince DCLM (from Prince 1986).



Mixed *Halophila ovalis* and *Halodule uninervis* meadow adjacent to Mangrove Point inner anchorage area, Roebuck Bay – September 2007 (L) & October 2012 (R) . Photos: Len McKenzie.



Halophila ovalis (above left) and *Halodule uninervis* (above right) meadow adjacent to Mangrove Point, Roebuck Bay - 01 August 1984. Photos: R Prince DCLM (from Prince 1986).



Halophila ovalis (above left) and *Halodule uninervis* (above right) meadow adjacent to Mangrove Point, Roebuck Bay - 7 November 2006. Photos: Danielle Bain EK.

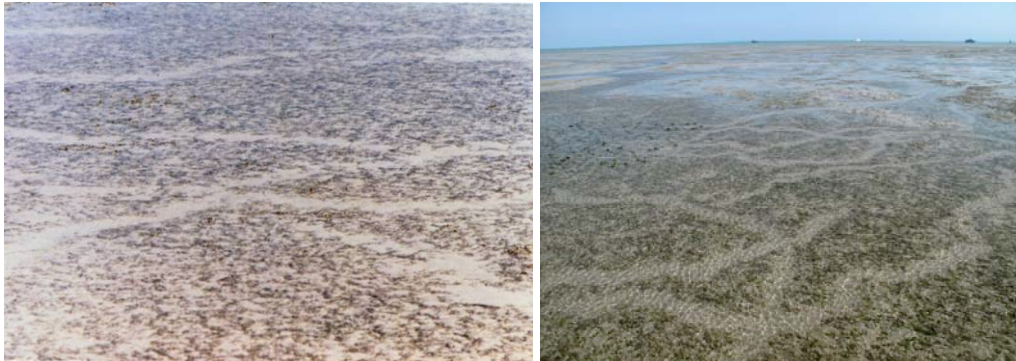


Halophila ovalis (above left) and *Halophila ovalis* / *Halodule uninervis* (above right) meadow at RO2, Roebuck Bay - 3 September 2007. Photos: Len McKenzie.



Halophila minor meadow on intertidal mud banks to north of Buccaneer Rock, Roebuck Bay - 31 July 1984. Photos: R Prince DCLM (from Prince 1986).

A survey of dugongs in the Kimberley, conducted by the former Department of Conservation and Land Management in 1984 Prince, 1986, estimated the population in Roebuck Bay at 50 - 100 individuals. Current population levels are unknown.

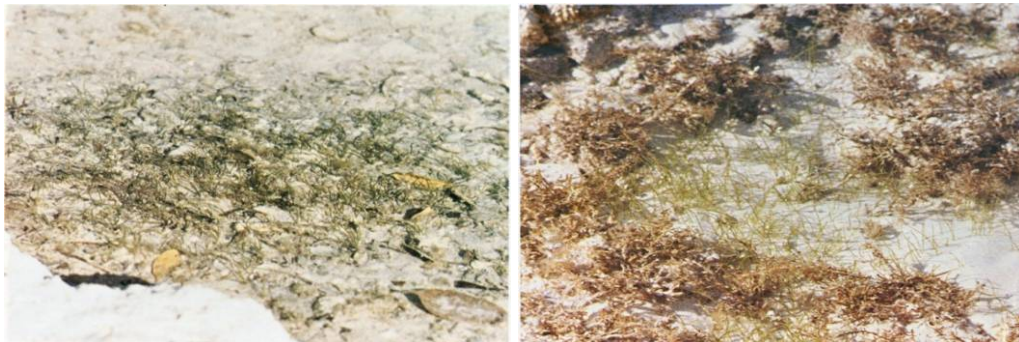


Dugong feeding trails in mixed *Halophila ovalis* and *Halodule uninervis* meadow adjacent to Mangrove Point inner anchorage area, Roebuck Bay:

Left - 01 August 1984. Photo: R Prince DCLM (from Prince 1986), Right - 30 September 2012. Photo: Rudi Yoshida.

Cable Beach to Quondong Point

North of Roebuck Bay, isolated *Halodule uninervis* patches have been reported at Barred Creek (Cape Boileau) and monospecific meadows of *Syringodium isoetifolium* at Quondong Point, in rock pools with coarse sediments Prince, 1986.



Halodule uninervis meadow (above left) in pool on raised terrace, Barred Creek (Cape Boileau - 28 July 1984) and *Syringodium isoetifolium* meadow(above right), Quondong Point (29 July 1984). Photo: R Prince DCLM (from Prince 1986).

Quondong Point to Coulomb Point

The majority of the area around Coulomb Point consisted of fine sand substratum (70% sand coverage), from the shallow water out to the extent of the survey boundary, with patches of sand waves and dunes seen in the shallower water transects.

The presence of seagrass had been suggested in the subtidal areas adjacent to James Price Point due to the presence of dugongs Prince, 1986, however this was not verified until the area was examined between November 2007 and December 2008 as part of a benthic habitat survey to identify possible locations for a proposed common-user liquefied natural gas (LNG) hub precinct in the Kimberley region Fry et al., 2008.

Seasonally-abundant subtidal *Halophila* communities and turf or mat green algae were identified on the inshore flat sandy patches between subtidal sand dunes and waves Fry et al., 2008. These subtidal meadows were first observed during surveys undertaken by the former Department of Environment and Conservation in November 2007, when seagrass abundance was seasonally high. Repeat surveys of some locations where seagrass was found in November

2007 were undertaken in April 2008 but no seagrass was recorded. Seagrass had re-established in these areas by June 2008 and surveys by DEC in December 2008 found prolific seed production in *Halophila* sp, suggesting that recruitment from seed may be a very important process for sustaining these seagrass Communities Masini et al., 2009.

The offshore flat sandy areas from Quondong Point to Coulomb Point were found to have almost exclusively bioturbated habitat dominated by sand dunes and waves. No seagrass or other marine plants were observed in these habitats.

Coulomb Point to Beagle Bay

A few isolated patches of *Enhalus acoroides* have been reported on the reef flat on the south side of West Island in the Lacepedes group, and *Halophila ovalis* has been observed off the reef edge in the channel (R Prince, Pers. Comm.).

Halophila spinulosa which is usually found in deeper water (to 45 m depth) has been reported in shallower water in areas of rapid tidal movement either in patches between larger species or as sparse populations at Tooker Point (Alligator Creek) and Sandy Point (Beagle Bay) Walker and Prince, 1987. Extensive *Halophila minor* meadows have also been reported to occur in the shallower waters at Tooker Point, Alligator Creek, and Sandy Point, Beagle Bay Walker and Prince, 1987. Dugongs feeding trails and animals have been observed in the area.

Beagle Bay to Cape Borda (including Perpendicular Head)

Seagrass was reported in the inshore areas of Perpendicular Head during a benthic habitat survey to identify possible locations for a proposed common-user liquified natural gas (LNG) hub precinct in the Kimberley region Fry et al., 2008. Small isolated patches of unidentified *Halophila* species were observed throughout the area where flat sandy substrates dominated. Most of the inshore areas of Perpendicular Head were dominated by green turf or mat algae and patches of red algae.

No seagrass has been reported in the deeper waters of the region (15-20m) where the seabed is predominantly made up of fine sand (70% coverage) interspersed with small patches of sand waves and dunes Fry et al., 2008.

Cape Borda to Cape Leveque

The coastal seabed in this region is predominately low (< 0.5m) and high (0.5-2m) relief reef structure separated by patches of coarse sand, sand waves and dunes Fry et al., 2008. Seagrass (unidentified *Halophila*) is present in relatively high coverage within the small bays in the northern part of this region in June 2008 Fry et al., 2008. Green algae (turf and mat) are also common in the shallow and intertidal areas along the coast. Little biohabitat is present in offshore areas where the substrate was mostly fine sand and some coarse sand patches.

Located south of Cape Leveque, the Chile Creek seascape is significantly influenced by the high tidal range (9.6m). Dense patches of *Enhalus acoroides* with *Halophila ovalis* and *Halodule uninervis* are found scattered amongst the large tidal pools that remain during the low spring tides (www.seagrasswatch.org). This is one of the few locations in Western Australia where *Enhalus acoroides* has been found. Dugongs have been reported to visit these meadows over time.



Enhalus acoroides meadow (above left) and *Halophila ovalis* (above right), Chile Creek (31 August 2007).
Photo: Len McKenzie.

King Sound region

King Sound encompasses the Fitzroy River estuary and is the receiving basin for the Fitzroy River. This region is macro-tidal with low wave energy. There are extensive tidal flats subject to extreme variations in turbidity and tide fluctuations throughout the area. There are also numerous islands in the region. The northern reaches of the sound includes the Buccaneer Archipelago. The region is an important area for dugongs, which have been reported from One Arm Point in the King Sound since 1688 Marsh, 1991; Adam, 2003.

The most diverse seagrass meadows in the Kimberley region have been reported on the reef platforms in the One Arm Point – Sunday Island area. The location with the highest biodiversity of seagrasses was around One Arm Point, where ten species were reported (*Thalassia hemprichii*, *Thalassodendron ciliatum*, *Enhalus acoroides*, *Halophila ovalis*, *Halodule uninervis*, *Halophila minor*, *Cymodocea serrulata*, *Cymodocea angustata*, *Syringodium isoetifolium* and *Halodule pinifolia*) Walker and Prince, 1987.

Meadows are dominated by *Thalassia hemprichii* with *Halophila ovalis*, *Halodule uninervis* and *Halophila minor*. *Cymodocea serrulata* occurs on a raised reef platform at Sunday Island (protected from wave action) as a continuous canopy, or with *Enhalus acoroides* and *Thalassodendron ciliatum* Walker and Prince, 1987.



Thalassia hemprichii meadow on reef platform. Above left: Sunday Island channel, 6 August 1984. Photo: R Prince DCLM (from Prince 1984). Above right: One Arm Creek, 1 September 2007. Photo: L McKenzie.



Mixed *Thalassia hemprichii* and *Halophila ovalis* meadow, a. One Arm Point – 4 August 1984; b. Sunday Island channel, southern end – 6 August 1984. Photos: R Prince DCLM (from Prince 1986).



Halophila ovalis meadow on reef platform, One Arm Creek, 1 September 2007. Photo: L McKenzie.



Thalassia hemprichii meadow on reef platform, One Arm Creek, 1 September 2007. Photo: L McKenzie.

Enhalus acoroides is only known in Western Australia from the One Arm Point, Chile Creek and Lacepedes regions where it occurs in isolated patches in coarse sediments on raised reef platforms Walker and Prince, 1987.



Enhalus acoroides meadow, a. One Arm Point – 4 August 1984; b. Sunday Island, southern end – 6 August 1984. Photos: R Prince DCLM (from Prince 1986).



Enhalus acoroides isolated plants (left) and patches (right) on reef platform, One Arm Creek, 1 September 2007. Photo: L McKenzie.



Mixed *Thalassia hemprichii* and *Halodule uninervis* meadow, One Arm Point: left – 4 August 1984. Photo: R Prince DCLM (from Prince 1986). Right, 1 September 2007. Photo: L McKenzie.

These tropical seagrasses are relatively numerous around the Northern Islands of the Buccaneer Archipelago, however they do not form extensive meadows along the coast where the strong currents and large tidal flows are predominant.

It is unknown if the seagrasses of One Arm Point have changed significantly since the 1980's. In an attempt to provide a better understanding of the status of seagrass meadows and how they change seasonally, a Seagrass-Watch monitoring site was established in the region by the Kimberley Land Council - Land & Sea Unit in partnership with the Bardi Jawi people.

King Sound to NT border

Unfortunately, little information is available on the estuarine and marine flora present or likely to occur in the northern Kimberley region, as the coastline is largely unexplored for seagrass distribution. With high tidal range, visibility is often poor, and conventional remote sensing techniques are of limited use for mapping. The abundance of crocodiles make the survey of estuarine and marine plants difficult and hazardous. There are a few isolated reports of subtidal seagrasses at Scott Reef, Montgomery Islands, and on reefs at Talbot Bay (R Prince, Pers. Comm.). However, the remaining coast is particularly rugged and dominated by high temperature and pulsed turbidity events due to the high rainfall December – March.

In an aerial survey of the region in 1984, no dugongs were sighted Prince, 1986 suggesting that the probability of significant seagrass meadows is low. Nevertheless, dugongs are reported to occur in Napier Broome Bay near Kalumburu in the far north of the region.

SEAGRASS-WATCH IN THE KIMBERLEY REGION

To provide an early warning of change, long-term monitoring has been established in Roebuck Bay and Dampier Peninsula as part of the Seagrass-Watch, global seagrass assessment and monitoring program (www.seagrasswatch.org) McKenzie et al., 2000. Establishing a network of monitoring sites in the Kimberley region provides valuable information on temporal trends in the health status of seagrass meadows in the region and provides a tool for decision-makers in adopting protective measures. It encourages local communities to become involved in seagrass management and protection. Working with both scientists and local stakeholders, this approach is designed to draw attention to the many local anthropogenic impacts on seagrass meadows which degrade coastal ecosystems and decrease their yield of natural resources.



Seagrass-Watch monitoring at Town Beach (Roebuck Bay):
left - September 2007 and right - October 2012 (Photos: Len McKenzie)

The following is a summary of the current status of Seagrass-Watch monitoring in the Kimberley region.

Roebuck Bay

Monitoring: ongoing, *quarterly*

Principal watchers: Kylie Weatherall, Anthony Aris, Gary Lienert, Jon Hall, Volker Mischker, Alessandro Nicoletti, Cath Ralston, Kandy Curran, Adrian Boyle, Alex Watson, Dominic Yanawana, Gerard Bennett, Jenny Costigan, Jessica Bangu, Joey Munro, John Hopiga, Kevin Smith, Neil Hamaguchi, Phillip Matsumoto, Sharon Ferguson, Fiona Bishop

Occasional and past watchers: Adrian Boyle, Ana Dalitz, Anthony Richardson, Bel Catchside, Ben Ansell, Brendan Smith, Caterina Carson, Catherine Bishop, Catherine Cochrane, Chris Howe Ping, Chris Sampi, Clare Morton, Claudia Curran, Corey Thorne, Craig Hamaguchi, Curtis Robinson, Dane Freeman, Danielle Bain, Darren Stevens, David Trudgen, Deanne Bird, Dwayne George, Elizabeth Malone, Emily Burke, Emma Ellis, Erica Shedley, Fiona Galloway, Frankie O'Conner, Franky O'Connor, Gary Lienert, Gavin, Gay Marsden, Georgia Wheeler, Grant Morton, Hannah Beadle, Hannah Curran, Howard Pedersen, Jacqueline McKenzie, Jane Lawton, Janine Bedros, Janine Furtado, Jason Fong, Jason Simmons, Jeanette Hunt, Jeanie Govan, Jenny Costigan, Jessica Koleck, Jo Jones, John Curran, John Hall, John Sawyer, Josh Coates, Judith Howell, Julia Noakes, Julie Western, Kate Golson, Karen Gorman, Kenneth Callaghan, Kevin George, Kevin Smith, Jon Hall, Kirsten Pearce, Lauren Hutton, Lauren Johnson, Lindsay Sawyer, Louise Beames, Louise Mullin, Luke Halling, Luke Mischker, Luke Puertollano, Mark Warren, Martin Pritchard, Maurice Connor, Melissa Williams, Michelle Haage, Michelle Smith, Michelle Teoh, Pat Lowe, Miranda Curran, Miranda Dibdin, Mizuyo Ichinohe, Nancy Vozoff, Jo Jones, Naomi Findlay, Pat Foley, Pat Lowe, Patrick Kitcchner, Philippa Girgiw, Phillipa, Querida Hutchinson, Rachael Leamy, Rebeka Wilson, S. Fong, Sam Tonkin, Sarah McMillan, Seth Lovell, Stephen Russell, Taro Bin Amat, Teresa Coutts, Theo Dann, Thomas Aaron, Thomas King, Tim Malone, Todd Quartermaine, Troy Sinclair, Trudy Classens, Viv de Boer, Wendy Trudgen, William Miller, Zenaida Cayaon, Seagrass-Watch HQ

Location: intertidal sand flat in the northern section of the bay between Town Beach and the port.

Site code: RO1, RO2, RO3

Issues: coastal development, vessel movement, stormwater and urban runoff

RO1 position: S 17.97671 E122.23855 (heading 160 degrees)

RO2 position: S17.98062 E122.23173 (heading 150 degrees)

RO3 position: S17.99672 E122.21418 (heading 120 degrees)

Best tides: <0.6m (port Broome 62650)

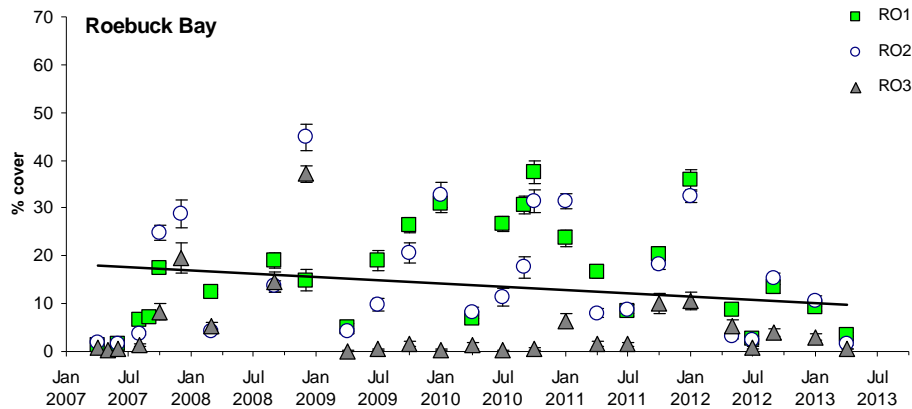
Issues: Urban runoff

Comments: Extensive seagrass meadows occur in the northern regions of Roebuck Bay, particularly in the Town Beach area, and are dominated by *Halophila ovalis* and *Halodule uninervis*. Most abundant sections are where pooling of water occurs at low tide.

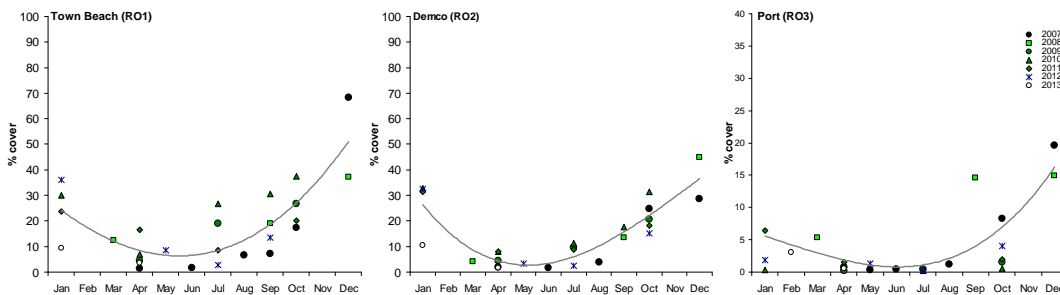
Dugong feeding trails are common. A survey of dugongs in the Kimberley, conducted in 1984, estimated the population in Roebuck Bay at 50 - 100 individuals Prince, 1986. Current population levels are unknown.

Status (Apr13):

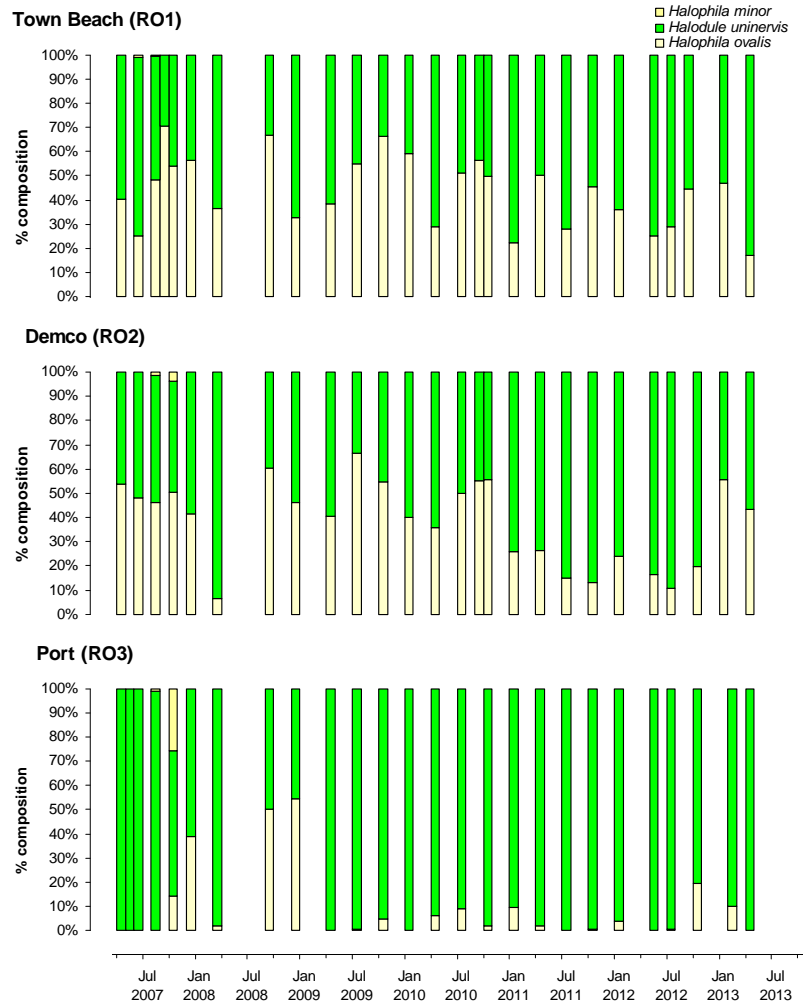
- seagrass abundance fluctuates seasonally within years, however long term trend appears to be declining slightly.
- Abundances in 2012-13 appear slightly lower than previous years.



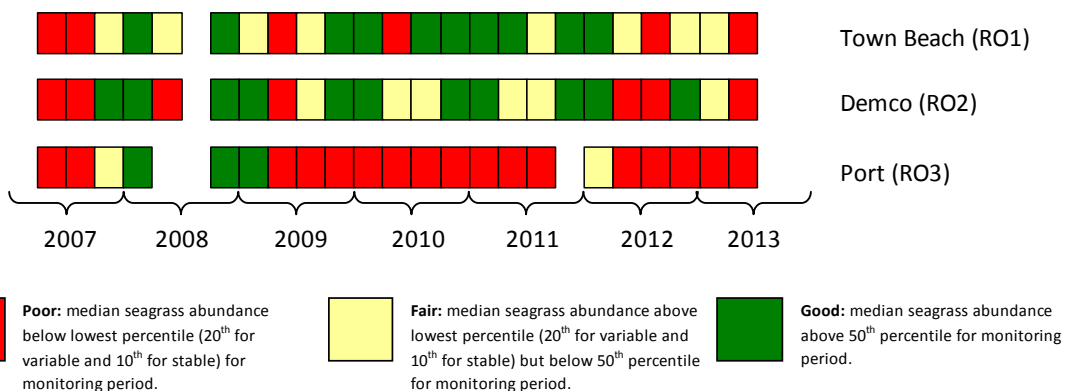
- seagrass abundance appears seasonal with higher abundances in late dry to early monsoon (October/December) and lower in late monsoon to early dry (April/June).



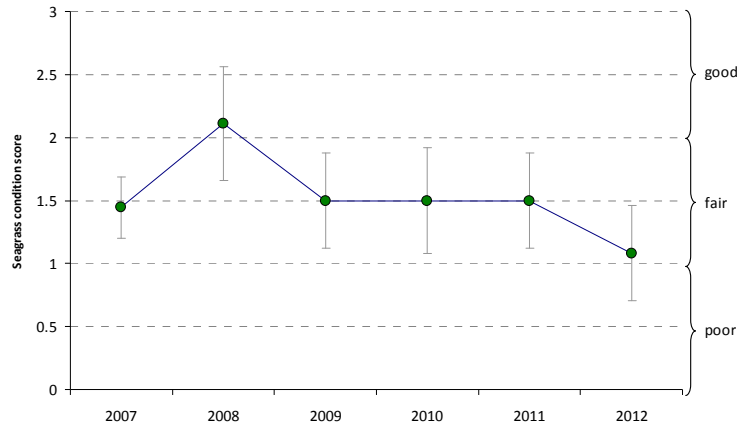
- all sites dominated were by *Halodule uninervis* with variable composition of *Halophila ovalis*



- seagrass abundance indicators were derived for RO1 and RO2 as the variance for the 50th and 20th percentiles was found to level off at around 24 samples (i.e. sampling events), suggesting this number of samples was sufficient to provide a reasonable estimate of the true percentile value.
- using the seagrass guidelines values, seagrass state was determined for each monitoring event at each site by scoring the median values relative to the percentiles. As RO3 was not suitable as a reference site (due to adjacent impacts), the guidelines values for RO2 were substituted.
- although seagrass abundance improved at Town Beach (RO1) and Demco (RO2) in late dry/early monsoon of 2012-13, it declined to a poor state in April 2013 following the monsoon. Seagrass status remained poor at the Port (RO3) site.



- Overall indications are that seagrass in the Broome region at the end of the 2012 calendar year was in a **fair** state (*state scored on a scale of 0 to 3 against the guidelines and relative to the previous sampling event*). Seagrass state for 2013 is not presented as data is incomplete.



Dampier Peninsula

Monitoring: ongoing, *quarterly*

Principal watchers: Bardi Jawi Land and Sea Rangers (Damon Pyke, Trevor Sampi, Chris Sampi, Nathan Sampi, Kevin George, Dwayne George, Phillip McCarthy, Terry McCarthy, Mark Shadforth)

Occasional and past watchers: Todd Quartermaine

Location: One Arm Point

Site codes: OA1

OA1 position: S16.43804 E123.06846 (*heading 30 degrees*)

Chile Ck position: S16.51832 E122.86389

Best tides: <4m Karakatta Bay (*port 62750*)

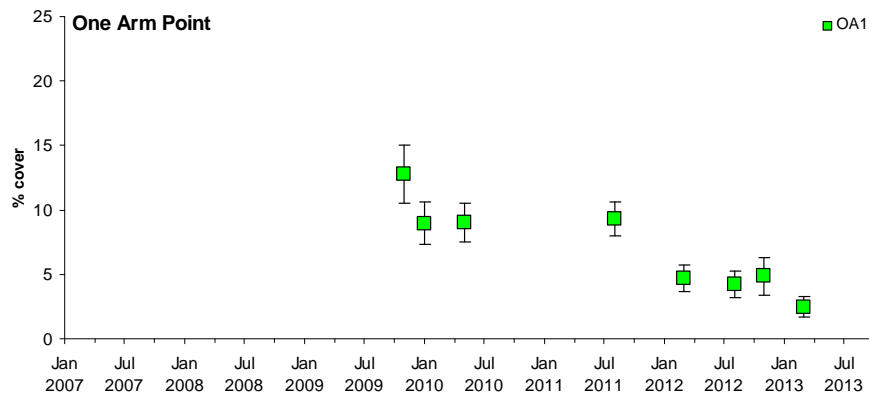
Issues: none identified

Comments: The most diverse seagrass meadows in the Kimberley region have been reported on the reef platforms in the One Arm Point. Dugongs and turtles are often reported feeding on these meadows.

It is unknown if the seagrasses of the Dampier Peninsula have changed significantly since the 1980's.

Status (Apr13):

- only 1 site established (no replication due to size of meadow)
- site only contains *Thalassia hemprichii*
- abundances in 2012-13 were lower than previous years.
- long-term trend suggests seagrass abundance is declining.



For more information, visit <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/WA.html>

A guide to the identification of tropical Western Australia's Seagrasses

Adapted from Waycott et al., 2004.

Leaves cylindrical



cylindrical

Syringodium isoetifolium

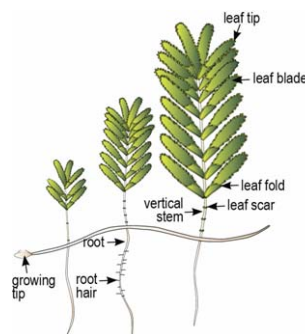
- leaves taper to a point
- leaves contain air cavities
- inflorescence a "cyme"
- leaves 7-30cm long

Leaves oval to oblong



oval to oblong

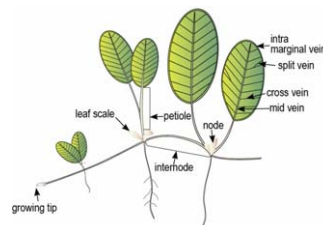
obvious vertical stem with more than 2 leaves



Halophila spinulosa

- leaves arranged opposite in pairs
- leaf margin serrated
- shoots can be up to 15cm long
- 10-20 pairs of leaves per shoot
- leaf 15-20mm long and 3-5mm wide

leaves with petioles, in pairs



Halophila decipiens

- leaf margins finely serrated
- fine hairs on both sides of leaf blade
- leaf apex rounded to slightly pointed
- leaf 10–25mm long and 3–10mm wide
- 6-8 cross vein pairs

Halophila minor

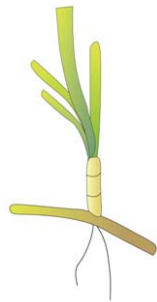
- less than 8 pairs of cross veins
- leaf 5-15mm long and 3.5-6mm wide
- leaf margins smooth
- no leaf hairs

Halophila ovalis

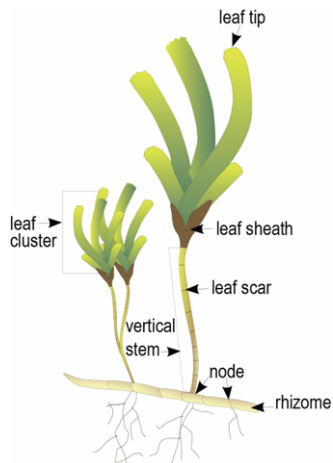
- cross veins 8 or more pairs
- leaf 5-40mm long and 5-20mm wide
- leaf margins smooth
- no leaf hairs

Leaves strap-like

Leaves can arise from vertical stem



straplike



Cymodocea angustata

- leaf tapers toward the apex, with widely spaced serration
- leaf with <13 longitudinal veins
- leaf sheath slightly obconical and scars open - not continuous around upright stem
- one unbranched root at each node on rhizome

Cymodocea serrulata

- leaf tip rounded with serrated edge
- leaf 4-9mm wide with 13-17 parallel veins
- leaf sheath broadly flat and triangular, not fibrous
- leaf sheath scars not continuous around upright stem

Halodule pinifolia

- leaf tip rounded
- narrow leaf blades 0.25-1.2mm wide
- leaf with 3 distinct parallel veins, sheaths fibrous
- rhizome usually white with small black fibres at the nodes

Halodule uninervis

- leaf tip tri-dentate or pointed, not rounded
- leaf blades 0.5-5mm wide
- leaf with 3 distinct parallel veins, sheaths fibrous
- rhizome usually white with small black fibres at the nodes

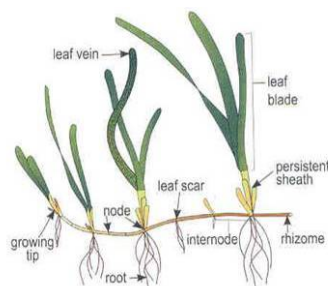
Thalassia hemprichii

- leaf tip rounded, may be slightly serrated
- leaf 4-12mm wide with 9-11 parallel veins
- leaf with obvious red flecks, 1-2mm long
- leaf often distinctly curved
- rhizome thick with distinct scars, usually triangular in shape
- one short root per rhizome node

Thalassodendron ciliatum

- distinct upright stem
- clusters of curved leaves (>5 mm wide), margins serrated
- stem and rhizome woody

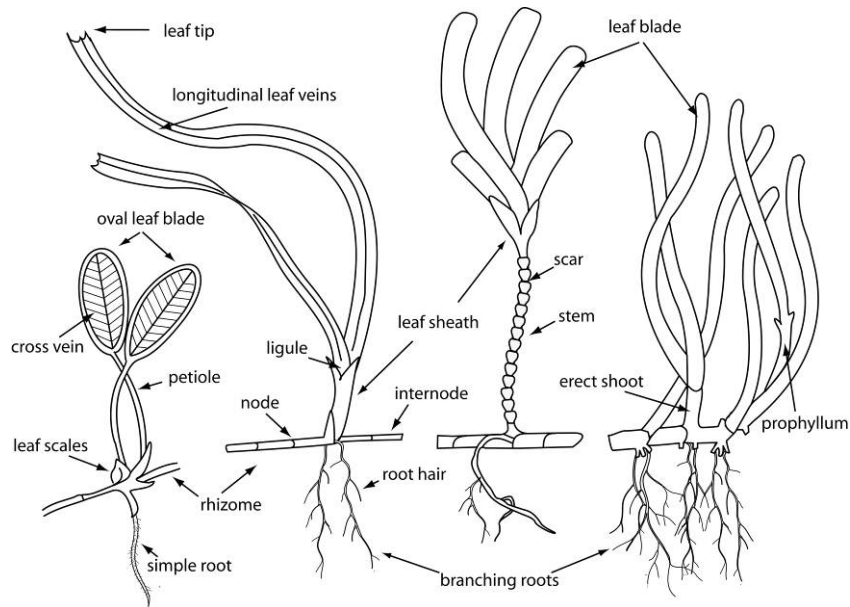
Leaves always arise directly from rhizome


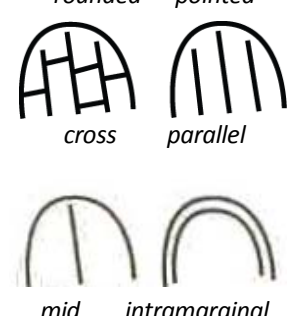


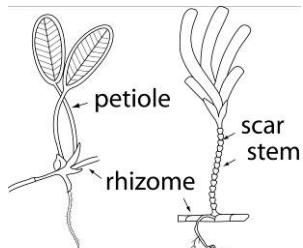


Enhalus acoroides

- large plant, leaves >30 cm long, >1 cm wide
- in-rolled edges of leaves
- long, black bristles protruding from thick rhizome
- cord-like roots

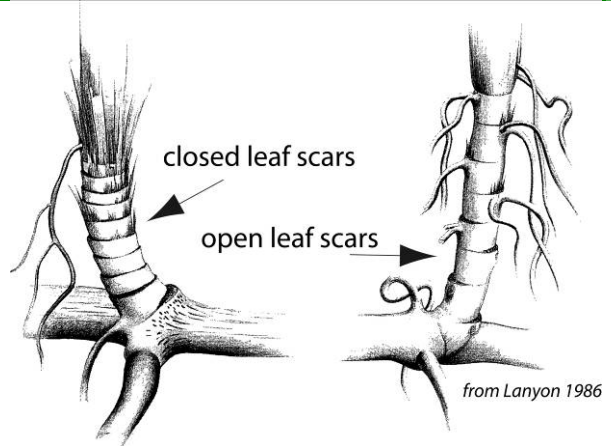
Parts of a seagrass plant



Leaf		
Tip	Can be rounded or pointed. Tips are easily damaged or cropped, so young leaves are best to observe.	 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>rounded</i> <i>pointed</i></p>
Veins	Used by the plant to transport water, nutrients and photosynthetic products. The pattern, direction and placement of veins in the leaf blade are used for identification. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cross-vein: perpendicular to the length of the leaf • parallel-vein: along the length of the leaf • mid-vein: prominent central vein • intramarginal-vein: around inside edge of leaf 	 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>cross</i> <i>parallel</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>mid</i> <i>intramarginal</i></p>
Edges	The edges of the leaf can be either serrated, smooth or inrolled	 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>serrated</i> <i>smooth</i> <i>inrolled</i></p>
Sheath	A modification of the leaf base that protects the newly developing tissue. The sheath can entirely circle the vertical stem or rhizome (continuous) or not (non-continuous); fully or partly cover the developing leaves and be flattened or rounded. Once the leaf has died, persistent sheaths may remain as fibres or bristles.	 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>clean & flattened</i> <i>fibrous</i></p>
Attachment	The leaf can attach directly to the rhizome, where the base of the leaf clasps the rhizome, or from a vertical stem or stalk (petiole) e.g. <i>Halophila ovalis</i> .	 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>rhizome</i> <i>petiole</i> <i>scar</i> <i>stem</i></p>

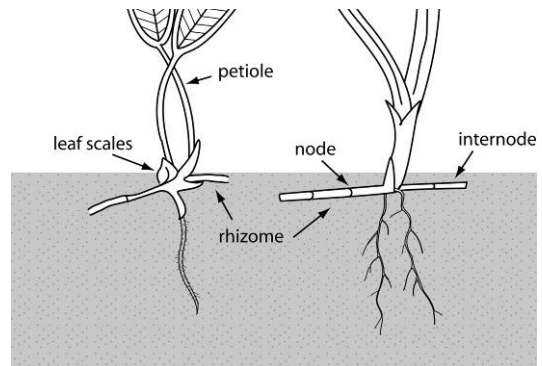
Stem

The vertical stem, found in some species, is the upright axis of the plant from which leaves arise (attach). The remnants of leaf attachment are seen as scars. Scars can be closed (*entirely circle the vertical stem*) or open (*do not entirely circle the vertical stem*).



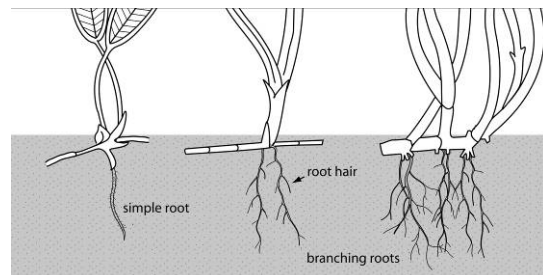
Rhizome

The horizontal axis of the seagrass plant, usually in sediment. It is formed in segments, with leaves or vertical stem arising from the joins of the segments, the nodes. Sections between the nodes are called internodes. Rhizomes can be fragile, thick and starchy or feel almost woody and may have scars where leaves were attached.



Root

Underground tissues that grow from the node, important for nutrient uptake and stabilisation of plants. The size and thickness of roots and presence of root hairs (very fine projections) are used for identification. Some roots are simple or cordlike, others may be branching, depending on seagrass species.



Notes:

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Monitoring a seagrass meadow

Monitoring is [the repeated observation of a system, usually to detect change](#). It is an integrated activity to evaluate the condition of the physical, chemical and biological character of the environment. Environment monitoring programs provide coastal managers with information and assist them to make decisions with greater confidence.

Environmental monitoring programs are ideally designed to: quantify the causes of change; examine and assess acceptable ranges of change for the particular site; and to measure levels of impacts.

Common drivers (reasons) for monitoring include: community interest; government policies such as Coastal Strategies and Plans, Oceans Policy, State of the Environment Reporting (SoE), Water Quality guidelines or Best Practice Guidelines; and Government Legislation (e.g., Fish Habitat Protection).

Users of the monitoring program information/results are diverse, including for example: the general public, environmental regulators - legislators, resource managers and scientists.

There are a number of issues to consider when implementing a monitoring program, including: ensure the protocols used have explicit objectives; clearly identified responsibilities of the partners (e.g. Gov agencies, consultants, community groups); a clear and defensible rationale for using the parameters that are measures (e.g. physico/chemico, biological indicators); to have a [baseline \(first\) assessment / measure against which subsequent changes can be measured/compared](#); knowledge of spatial and temporal variation prior to designing the program (i.e. pilot study); clearly defined field protocols; data management procedures, ensure the level of change and accuracy of the detection is appropriate (as will vary according to the methodology); selection of statistical tools; and a mechanism to [reduce and manage errors \(i.e. QA/QC program\)](#).

Appropriate Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) procedures are an integral component of all aspects of sample collection and analysis in monitoring programs. This includes participation in relevant inter-laboratory studies, proficiency testing, and the use of standard reference materials. Monitoring programs often include the following guidelines for implementation by data collectors and reporters:

- appropriate methods must be in place to ensure consistency in field procedures to produce robust, repeatable and comparable results including consideration of sampling locations, replication and frequency;
- all methods used must be fit for purpose and suited to a range of conditions;
- appropriate accreditation of participating laboratories or provision of standard laboratory protocols to demonstrate that appropriate laboratory QA/QC procedures are in place for sample handling and analysis;
- participation in inter-laboratory performance testing trials and regular exchange of replicate samples between laboratories;
- rigorous procedures to ensure 'chain of custody' and tracking of samples;
- appropriate standards and procedures for data management and storage; and
- a process to ensure data collectors are aware of any errors and provide an opportunity to clarify or correct data.

Monitoring seagrass

Seagrasses are often at the downstream end of catchments, receiving runoff from a range of agricultural, urban and industrial land-uses. Seagrass communities are generally susceptible to changes in water quality and environmental quality that make them a useful indicator of environmental health. Seagrass make good **bioindicators** of environmental health because they are:

- are widely distributed;
- have an important ecological role;
- are sessile plants which show measurable and timely responses to external stressors/impacts (rather than relocating to a less stressful environment) and;
- are integrative of environmental conditions.

Several factors are important for the persistence of healthy seagrass meadows, these include: sediment quality and depth; water quality (temperature, salinity, clarity); current and hydrodynamic processes; and species interactions (e.g., epiphytes and grazers). Seagrass generally respond in a typical manner that allows them to be measured and monitored. In reporting on the health of seagrasses it is important to consider the type of factors that can affect growth and survival. Factors include:

- increased turbidity reduces light penetration through the water, interfering with photosynthesis and limiting the depth range of seagrass;
- increased nutrient loads encourages algal blooms and epiphytic algae to grow to a point where it smothers or shade seagrasses, thereby reducing photosynthetic capacity;
- increased sedimentation can smother seagrass or interferes with photosynthesis;
- herbicides can kill seagrass and some chemicals (e.g., pesticides) can kill associated macrofauna;
- boating activity (propellers, mooring, anchors) can physically damage seagrass meadows, from shredding leaves to complete removal;
- storms, floods and wave action can rip out patches of seagrasses.

Seagrass-Watch

A simple method for monitoring seagrass resources is used in the Seagrass-Watch program. This method uses standardised measurements taken from sites established within representative intertidal meadows to monitor seagrass condition. The number and position of sites can be used to investigate natural and anthropogenic impacts.

Seagrass-Watch is one of the largest seagrass monitoring programs in the world. Since its genesis in [March 1998](#) in Australia, Seagrass-Watch has now expanded internationally to more than 26 countries. Monitoring is currently occurring at over 350 sites. To learn more about the program, visit www.seagrasswatch.org.

Seagrass-Watch aims to raise awareness on the condition and trend of nearshore seagrass ecosystems and provide an early warning of major coastal environment changes. Participants of Seagrass-Watch are generally volunteers from a wide variety of backgrounds who all share the common interest in marine conservation. Most participants are associated with established local community groups, schools, universities & research institutions, government (local & state) or non-government organisations.

Seagrass-Watch integrates with existing education, government, non-government and scientific programs to raise community awareness to protect this important marine habitat for the benefit of the community. The program has a strong scientific underpinning with an emphasis on consistent data collection, recording and reporting. Seagrass-Watch identifies

areas important for seagrass species diversity and conservation and the information collected is used to assist the management of coastal environments and to prevent significant areas and species being lost.

Seagrass-Watch methods were developed to be rigorous, yet relatively simple and easy to use. Each of the parameters used have been carefully chosen with a clear and defensible rationale. The protocols used have explicit objectives and the sampling strategy is prepared using baseline and knowledge of spatial and temporal variation. As the collection of data by a diversity of participants necessitates a high level of training to ensure that the data is of a standard that can be used by management agencies. After 6–9 hours of training, participants can produce reliable data. Training includes both formal and informal approaches. Formal training is conducted by Seagrass-Watch HQ for participants 18 years of age and over, and includes formal lectures and on-site assessments with a tiered level of certification for competency. Formally trained participants are certified to supervise on-site monitoring and demonstrate (i.e. informally train) monitoring methods. Informal training is also conducted by local coordinators and/or scientists. Ideally, at least one formally trained volunteer is present at each monitoring event. Evidence of competency is securely filed at Seagrass-Watch HQ.

Seagrass-Watch has an accepted Quality Assurance-Quality Control program in place to ensure that the program is producing data of high quality, and that time and resources are not wasted. Seagrass-Watch HQ has systems in place to manage the way Seagrass-Watch data is collected, organised, documented, evaluated and secured. The Seagrass-Watch program collects and collates all data in a standard format. By using simple and easy methods, Seagrass Watch ensures completeness (the comparison between the amounts of valid or useable data originally planned to collect, versus how much was collected). Standard seagrass cover **calibration sheets** are used to ensure precision (the degree of agreement among repeated measurements of the same characteristic at the same place and the same time) and consistency between observers and across sites at monitoring times to [ensure percentage covers are close to a true or standardised value](#).

Other QAQC procedures include the selection of intertidal seagrass sites which are **permanently marked** with either plastic star pickets or an accurate (± 3 m) GPS waypoint. Labels identifying the sites and contact details for the program are attached to these pickets. Positions of 0 m and 50 m points for all three transects at a site are also noted using GPS. This ensures that the same site is monitored each event and that [data can be compared between periods of time](#).

Ongoing standardisation of observers is achieved by on-site refreshers of standard percentage covers by all observers prior to monitoring and through ad hoc comparisons of data returned from duplicate surveys (e.g. either a site or a transect will be repeated by scientist – preferably the next day and unknown to volunteers). Any discrepancy in these duplicates is used to identify and subsequently mitigate bias. For the most part however uncertainties in percentage cover or species identification are mitigated in the field via direct communication (as at least one experienced/certified observer is always present), or the collection of voucher specimens (to be checked under microscope and pressed in herbarium) and the use of a digital camera to record images (protocol requires at least 27% of quadrats are photographed) for later identification and discussion.

Seagrass-Watch HQ has implemented a quality assurance management system to ensure that data collected is organised and stored and able to be used easily. All data (datasheets and photographs) received are entered onto a relational database on a secure server. Receipt of all original data hardcopies is documented and filed within the James Cook University Management System, a formally organised and secure system. Seagrass-Watch HQ operates as custodian of data collected from other participants and provides an evaluation and analysis of the data for reporting purposes. Access to the IT system and databases is restricted to only

authorised personnel. Provision of data to a third party is only on consent of the data owner/principal.

Seagrass-Watch HQ checks all data for completeness, consistency and accuracy. All data submitted to Seagrass-Watch HQ it is first checked for compliancy:

- *legible original datasheets,*
- *good quality quadrat photographs (high resolution),*
- *voucher specimens (if required) and*
- *completed MS Excel spreadsheet.*

Validation is provided by checking observations against photographic records to ensure consistency of observers and by identification of voucher specimens submitted. In accordance with QA/QC protocols, Seagrass-Watch HQ advises observers via an official **Data Error Notification** of any [errors encountered/identified and provides an opportunity for correction/clarification](#) (this may include additional training).

Once Seagrass-Watch HQ has completed all checks, a field in the Master database identifies data as either passed, quarantined, non-compliant or not-passed. Non-compliant data is used for large-scale summary reporting only if the data quality is deemed acceptable, i.e. if it was collected by a Level 1 trained participant, that the scans/copies of datasheets are OK (*only if originals are not available*), and/or that the quadrat images were acceptable to complete QAQC, etc. If data quality is unacceptable, the data is either not entered into the Master database or remains quarantined/not-passed (excluded from analysis & reporting). If predominantly non-compliant data is used for detailed analysis and reporting at a site or location/region, it is marked on the outputs with a notice of non-compliance (e.g., site graphs). If officially requested data is non-compliant, a note in the metadata advises of non-compliance and includes a caveat to "use with caution". Any data considered unsuitable (e.g. nil response to data notification within thirty days) is quarantined or removed from the database.

Seagrass-Watch employs a proactive approach to monitoring, involving ongoing training for participants and the continued development of new methods and refinement of existing methods, including location/habitat specific calibration sheets, operation & validation of autonomous temperature and light loggers, etc. Quality data reassures the data users (e.g., coastal management agencies) that they can use the data to make informed decisions with confidence.

Seagrass-Watch monitoring efforts are vital to assist with tracking global patterns in seagrass health, and assessing human impacts on seagrass meadows, which have the potential to destroy or degrade these coastal ecosystems and decrease their value as a natural resource. Responsive management based on adequate information will help to prevent any further significant areas and species being lost. To protect the valuable seagrass meadows along our coasts, the community, government and researchers have to work together.

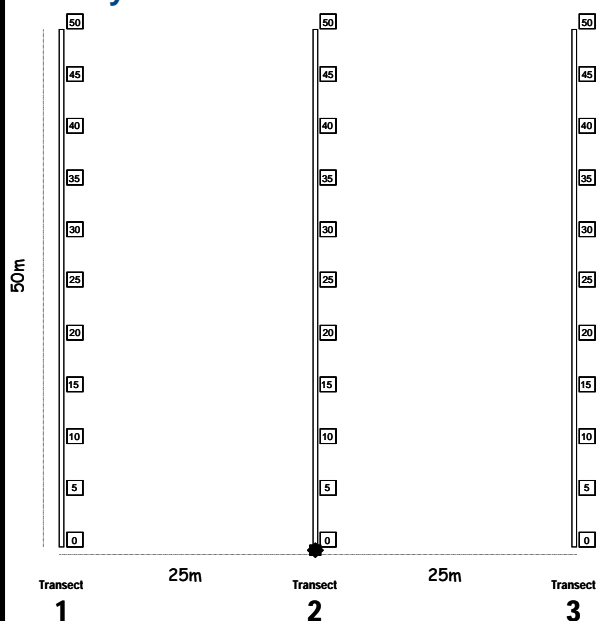
THE GOALS OF THE PROGRAM ARE:

- *To educate the wider community on the importance of seagrass resources*
- *To raise awareness of coastal management issues*
- *To build the capacity of local stakeholders in the use of standardised scientific methodologies*
- *To conduct long-term monitoring of seagrass & coastal habitat condition*
- *To provide an early warning system of coastal environment changes for management*
- *To support conservation measures which ensure the long-term resilience of seagrass ecosystems.*

Seagrass-Watch Protocols

Source: McKenzie et al., 2003 (www.seagrasswatch.org/manuals.html)

Site layout



Quadrat code = site + transect+quadrat

e.g., CJ1225 = Chek Jawa, site 1, transect 2, 25m quadrat

Pre-monitoring preparation

Make a Timetable

Create a timetable of times of departure and arrival back, and what the objective of the day is and what is to be achieved on the day. Give a copy of this to all volunteers involved in advance so they can make their arrangements to get to the site on time. List on this timetable what the volunteers need to bring.

Have a Contact Person

Arrange to have a reliable contact person to raise the alert if you and the team are not back at a specified or reasonable time.

Safety

- Assess the risks before monitoring - check weather, tides, time of day, etc.
- Use your instincts - if you do not feel safe then abandon sampling.
- Do not put yourself or others at risk.
- Wear appropriate clothing and footwear.
- Be sun-smart.
- Adult supervision is required if children are involved
- Be aware of dangerous marine animals.
- Have a first aid kit on site or nearby
- Take a mobile phone or marine radio

Necessary equipment and materials

- 3x 50metre fibreglass measuring tapes
- 6x 50cm plastic tent pegs
- Compass
- 1x standard (50cm x 50cm) quadrat
- Magnifying glass
- 3x Monitoring datasheets
- Clipboard, pencils & 30 cm ruler
- Camera & film
- Quadrat photo labeller
- Percent cover standard sheet
- Seagrass identification sheets

Each sampling event

Within the 50m by 50m site, lay out the three 50 transects parallel to each other, 25m apart and perpendicular to shore (see site layout). Within each of the quadrats placed for sampling, complete the following steps:

Step 1. Take a Photograph of the quadrat

- Photographs are usually taken at the 5m, 25m and 45m quadrats along each transect, or of quadrats of particular interest. Use a quadrat free of strings and place the photo quadrat labeller beside the quadrat and tape measure with the correct code on it.
- Take the photograph from an angle as **vertical** as possible, which includes the entire quadrat frame, quadrat label and tape measure. Avoid having any shadows or patches of reflection off any water in the field of view. Check the photo taken box on datasheet for quadrat.

Step 2. Describe sediment composition

- Dig your fingers into the top centimetre of the substrate and feel the texture. Describe the sediment by noting the grain size in order of dominance (e.g., Sand, Fine sand, Fine sand/Mud).

Step 3. Describe other features and ID/count of macrofauna

- Note and count (whole numbers - never use < or > symbols) any features which may be of interest (e.g. gastropods, hermit crabs, turtle feeding) within the comments column.

Step 4. Estimate seagrass percent cover

- Looking down on the quadrat from above, estimate the total percentage of the seabed (substrate) within the quadrat covered by seagrass. Estimate the footprint/shadow provided by the seagrass shoots.
- Always use the percent cover photo standards (calibration sheets) as your guide, estimating cover as accurate as possible, e.g. 27%, 61%
- If cover is below 3%, you can count the seagrass shoots and calculate percent cover using the rule of 1 shoot = 0.1%

Step 5. Estimate seagrass species composition

- Identify the species of seagrass within the quadrat and determine the percent contribution of each species (starting with least abundant, total composition must equal 100%)
- Use seagrass species identification keys provided and use more than 1 feature to identify the species

Step 6. Measure seagrass canopy height

- Measure canopy height (in centimetres) of the dominant strap-leaf species, ignoring the tallest 20%.
- Measure from the sediment to the leaf tip of 3 shoots, entering all 3 measures onto datasheet

Step 7. Estimate algae percent cover

- Looking down on the quadrat from above, estimate the total percentage of the seabed (substrate) within the quadrat covered by macroalgae (independent of seagrass cover)
- Macroalgae is not attached to seagrass leaves and may be attached to rocks, shells or may be drift

Step 8. Estimate epiphyte percent cover

- Epiphytes are algae attached to seagrass blades and often give the blade a furry appearance.
- First estimate how much of an average seagrass leaf surface is covered, and then how many of the leaves in the quadrat are covered. For example, if 20% of the blades are each 50% covered by epiphytes, then quadrat epiphyte cover is 10%. Use the epiphyte matrix to assist you.
- Do not include epifauna with epiphytes. Epifauna are sessile animals attached to seagrass blades – record % cover of epifauna in the comments or an unused/blank column – do not add to epiphyte cover.

Step 9. Take a voucher seagrass specimen if required

- Place seagrass samples in a labelled plastic bag with a little seawater and a waterproof label. Select a representative specimen of the species and ensure that you have all the plant parts including the rhizomes and roots. Collect plants with fruits and flowers structures if possible.

Step 10. Move to next quadrat

- Repeat steps 1 to 8 for the remaining 32 quadrats

Step 11. At completion of monitoring

- Check data sheets are filled in fully.
- Remove equipment from site (e.g. non-permanent pegs)

At completion of monitoring

Step 1. Wash & pack gear

- Rinse all tapes, pegs and quadrats with freshwater and let them dry.
- Review supplies for next quarterly sampling and request new materials
- Store gear for next quarterly sampling

Step 2. Press any voucher seagrass specimens if collected

- The voucher specimen should be pressed as soon as possible after collection. Do not refrigerate longer than 2 days, press the sample as soon as possible.
- Allow to dry in a dry/warm/dark place for a minimum of two weeks. For best results, replace the newspaper after 2-3 days.

Step 3. Submit all data

- Data can be entered into the MS-Excel file downloadable from www.seagrasswatch.org. Email completed files to hq@seagrasswatch.org
- Mail original datasheets, photos and herbarium sheets

Seagrass-Watch HQ
TropWATER (James Cook University)
PO Box 6811
Cairns QLD 4870 AUSTRALIA

Enhalus acoroides



- very long ribbon-like leaves with inrolled leaf margins
- thick rhizome with long black bristles and cord-like roots
- leaves >30cm long

Halophila ovalis



- 8 or more cross veins
- no hairs on leaf surface
- leaf margins smooth
- leaf 5-20mm long

Thalassia hemprichii



- ribbon-like, curved leaves 10-40cm long
- leaf tip rounded, slightly serrated
- short black tannin cells, 1-2mm long, in leaf blade
- thick rhizome with scars between shoots

Halodule uninervis



- trident leaf tip
- 1 central vein
- usually pale rhizome, with clean black leaf scars

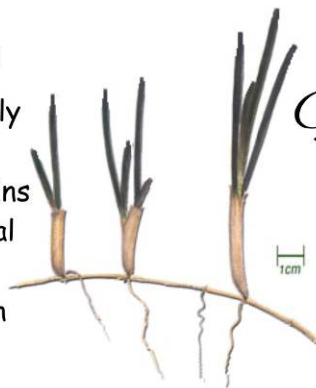
Halodule pinifolia



- rounded leaf tip
- 1 central vein
- usually pale rhizome, with clean black leaf scars

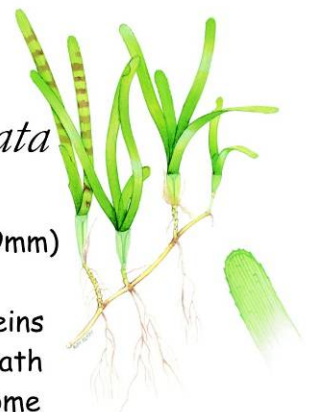
Cymodocea angustata

- leaf tapers toward tip, widely spaced serrations
- leaf with <13 longitudinal veins
- leaf sheath slightly obconical and scars open
- one unbranched root at each



Cymodocea serrulata

- serrated leaf tip
- wide leaf blade (5-9mm)
- leaves 6-15cm long
- 13-17 longitudinal veins
- clean triangular sheath
- robust/strong rhizome

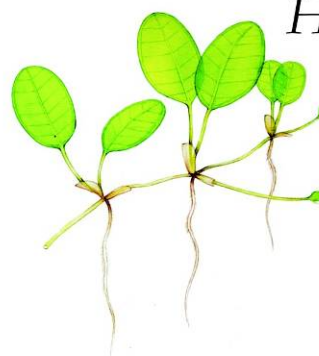


Syringodium isoetifolium



- narrow spaghetti-like leaves
- cylindrical in cross section, 1-2mm diameter
- leaves contain air cavities
- leaf tip tapers to a point
- leaves 7-30cm long

Halophila minor



- less than 8 pairs of cross veins
- small oval leaf blade less than 5mm wide
- leaf margins smooth
- no leaf hairs



SEAGRASS-WATCH MONITORING



ONE OF THESE SHEETS IS TO BE FILLED OUT FOR EACH TRANSECT YOU SURVEY

START of transect (GPS reading)

Latitude: 25° 11.2818' S Longitude: 152° 37.5372' E

OBSERVER: Bev Citizen DATE: 17 / 2 / 09
 LOCATION: Burnum Heads
 SITE code: BH1 TRANSECT no.: 2
 START TIME: 1304 END TIME: 1340

Quadrat (metres from transect origin)	Sediment (eg. mud/sand/shell)	Comments (eg 10x gastropods, 4x crab holes, dugong feeding trails, herbarium specimen taken)	Seagrass coverage (%)	% Seagrass species composition			Canopy height (cm)	% Algae cover	% Epi- cover
				HO	HU	ZC			
1 (0m)	Sand	SC x 3 HC x 1	40	30	70		514.17	5	33
2 (5m)	S	GAB x 3	33	50	50		1017.8	10	18
3 (10m)	mud/sand	worm x 1	18	70	20	10	618.5	0	48
4 (15m)	m s	DFT x 1	0				0	17	0
5 (20m)	m s shell	HC x 3	36	5	90	5	917.5	12	57
6 (25m)	m s sh	Turtle cropping	48	100			NA.	2	96
7 (30m)	Fine Sand		0				1cm	23	0
8 (35m)	FS	SC x 2 CH x 3	0.7		100		1.5cm	18	31
9 (40m)	S m		23	96	4		2cm	6	17
10 (45m)	m	Mudworek x 2 HC x 1	41	2	95	3	5.5, 1.6 9	3	21
11 (50m)	m s		16	3	7	90	716.17	38	6

END of transect (GPS reading)
 Latitude: 25° 11.2656' S Longitude: 152° 37.5546' E
 SC = Sea Cucumbers
 GAB = Gastropod
 DFT = Dugong feeding trail
 HC = Hermit Crab
 CH = Crab Hole

Making a herbarium press specimen

Herbaria are repositories of preserved and labelled plant specimens, arranged to allow easy access and archival storage. The specimens are typically in the form of herbarium sheets: pressed and dried plants that have been attached to a sheet of heavy paper together with a data label. A herbarium specimen is simple in form and low-tech in preparation, yet it preserves a wealth of valuable information. If properly stored, a herbarium specimen will last for centuries without much deterioration. Specimens document the variation in form and geographical range of species. Herbaria also document valuable historical collections, such as "type specimens", the original specimens on which a plant's Latin name is based. Many herbarium specimens record the existence of plants in habitats now developed and lost.

COLLECTION

Before collecting any seagrass specimens, ensure you have the appropriate permits. All flora that is native to Western Australia is protected throughout the state under the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950. Protected flora is defined as *any plant (including any wildflower, palm, shrub tree, fern, creeper or vine) and includes any part of a plant, including seeds and spores*. To take protected flora from Crown land² for non-commercial purposes a Scientific or Other Prescribed Purposes Licence is required. This licence covers activities such as identification, research, education, non-commercial propagation for local revegetation projects, or for hobby purposes. A copy of the application form and information sheet is attached.

In the field, collect a handful of representative seagrass shoots, including the leaves, rhizomes and roots. Keep in mind that it is not always possible to get a successful classification if you do not have particular parts such as flowers, fruits, seeds and roots, so try to select shoots which have these features. Ideally, collect plants with growing tips (apical meristems) as they contain higher concentrations of DNA which could aid genetic identification in the future.

Specimens should be pressed as soon as possible after collection. If it is more than 2 hours before you press the specimen, then you should refrigerate to prevent any decomposition. Do not refrigerate longer than 2 days, press the sample as soon as possible.

PRESSING

Tools

First you will need some clean white cartridge-type paper (photocopy paper will suffice) and herbarium sheets (if available). You will also need forceps, scissors/scalpel, a dish of clean fresh water and a herbarium press. It is not difficult to build a home-made press, keeping in mind that what must be accomplished is to keep the specimens squeezed between layers of paper (newspapers or blotting paper) until they are totally devoid of the original content of water. The upper and lower parts of the press might be made of heavy cardboard or thick plywood or equivalent material. A more advanced kind of press might be built for an optimal drying of your plants. This press can be made with two wooden boards with screws and nuts placed at each corner: turning the nuts the two boards will come closer pushing together the paper with the plants. This kind of press can be built at home or bought in some art tools stores.

² Crown Land refers to "All land, not being alienated land, within the limits of the State of Western Australia that form the airspace, seabed and subsoil of marine waters and coastal waters as defined under the Commonwealth's Coastal Waters (State Powers) Act 1980".

Preparation

Wash the seagrass specimen in clean fresh water and carefully remove any debris, epiphytes or sediment particles.

Arrangement

It is very important that the seagrass specimen be arranged so that you can immediately see all the main characters of that particular species; so do not focus only at the aesthetics of the mounted specimen. It is advisable to arrange specimens before being placed in the press as once dried, plant specimens can easily be broken if handled without care. The best manner to place the plants on the mounting sheets is to align them with the right side of the page (or diagonally if space is required) and to have the heaviest parts and specimens at the bottom. Leaves can be folded in larger specimens if a larger press is not available. It is better to leave an empty space at the borders of the mounting sheets; but you can either arrange your specimens (along with the label) in a regular way from page to page, or stagger the specimens at different positions on each sheet, so that each group of sheets will have a more equally distributed pressure.

Labels

Each specimen must have a label on its own sheet, which should include the taxonomic denomination (*at least family, genus and species*) along with information on the date and place of collection. The name of the collector and of the individual who did the determination should also be added. Use permanent and water resistant ink (black or blue) to write your labels; otherwise a pencil can be used (medium lead). Specimen labels should include:

- species name (*if known*)
- location & site code (*if applicable*)
- date collected
- latitude/longitude
- water depth
- % seagrass cover
- sediment type
- other seagrass species present
- name of collector and who identified the specimen
- comments -*such as presence of flowers/fruits or ecological notes*

Place the label on the lower right hand corner of the paper.

Drying

Place another clean sheet of paper over the specimen and place within several sheets of newspaper. As circulating air is very important to get your specimens dried in a short time, the assemblage of specimen/paper should be placed within two sheets of corrugated cardboard and then into a herbarium press. Corrugated cardboard ensures air can penetrate and speed up the drying process. If no corrugated cardboard is available, keep the filled press size small.

Once in the herbarium press, wind down the screws until tight (*do not over tighten*). If you do not have a press, the specimens can be pressed by putting some heavy object on top, i.e. bricks or large books. It is important that the plants are put under sufficient pressure; otherwise more time will be required to achieve a good desiccation, besides they could be damaged by dampness and moulds.



The press should be exposed to a gentle heat source, avoiding excessive heat that will "cook" the specimens. Sometimes it is possible to use the heat from the sun. In this case the presses should be small. If fire is the heat source, keep the press at a safe distance to prevent fire starting on the press.

Changing the paper is a very important step. In the first three or four days a paper change should take place every day, then you can leave more time between changes. If you neglect the change of paper the plants will take more time to lose their water content, besides they could be damaged if the paper stays wet for a few days. When changing the paper you must keep the specimens intact and ensure the label travels with the specimen. The minimum time required for complete drying ranges from two to four days or more. Once a specimen has become dry and stiff, it can be mounted and placed into the herbarium.

Mounting

Once the specimen is completely dry, you will need to mount it to herbarium sheets if available or a new clean white cartridge-type paper.

There are different ways to mount the specimens to the herbarium sheets, such as strapping, gluing, or pinning. We recommend the strapping method using removable adhesive tape (e.g. Magic Tape). The tape pulls off easily, leaves behind no messy residue, and can be pulled up and moved around. To fix the specimen to the mounting paper, lay small strips of tape across a few sturdy parts of the plant (e.g. either end of rhizome or a stem) at a minimal number of points. This method will allow a certain degree of movement for further examinations, but the specimen will not fall from the mounting paper

HERBARIA

Once the specimen is mounted it can be stored in a dry place or lodged in Herbaria. If you do not have a Herbaria in your region or state (usually located at a University or Government agency), you can submit specimens to Seagrass-Watch HQ which maintains a Herbaria as part of the Australian Tropical Herbarium.

Alternatively, you can email a scanned image of the pressed specimen. Please ensure that the scanned image is no less than 600 dpi and includes the specimen and label. Scanned images can be sent to hq@seagrasswatch.org and will be lodged in the Seagrass-Watch Virtual Herbarium <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/herbarium.html>.

The Virtual Herbarium is an electronic gateway to the collections of the Seagrass-Watch HQ herbaria. The goals of the Virtual Herbarium are to make specimen data available electronically for use in biodiversity research projects; to reduce transport of actual specimens for projects where digital representations will suffice for study; and to provide a source of reference information for Seagrass-Watch participants.



Application for a Scientific or Other Prescribed Purposes Licence

To take protected (native) flora taken from Crown land for non-commercial purposes

<p>Completed forms should be returned to: Department of Parks and Wildlife Locked Bag 30 Bentley Delivery Centre WA 6983 Or faxed to (08) 9334 0242 or emailed.</p>	<p>Further information on the licensing requirements is available from DPaW Wildlife Licensing Section Phone: (08) 9219 9836 Email: wildlifelicencing@dpaw.wa.gov.au</p>
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SCIENTIFIC OR OTHER PRESCRIBED PURPOSES LICENCES ARE ISSUED FOR A MAXIMUM **1-YEAR PERIOD**, WITH A **\$10 FEE**, HOWEVER IN SOME CASES THIS FEE IS WAIVED (REFER TO 'PAYMENT' SECTION FOR DETAILS)

PLEASE ALLOW **TEN (10) WORKING DAYS** TO PROCESS COMPLETE AND CORRECT APPLICATIONS.

PLEASE NOTE THAT RENEWAL OF A LICENCE IS DEPENDENT ON SATISFACTORY SUBMISSION OF **REPORT DETAILING COLLECTION ACTIVITIES** (IF IT WAS A CONDITION OF YOUR PREVIOUS LICENCE)

Applicant:

Surname Dr/Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms			Other names		
Address (residential)					
				Postcode	
Address (postal)					
				Postcode	
Day time Telephone			Business Name (if applicable)		
Date of birth	/ /		Previous Licence No.: S.....	Expiry Date: / /	

Details of your proposed use of flora

- Collection of flora for identification purposes during surveys while employed by
- Collection of flora for identification & specimen vouchering purposes with (name of herbarium)
- Collection of flora for non-commercial propagation purposes for use in local revegetation projects, while with (name of Community Group/Company)
- Collection of flora for study/ teaching/ research (circle your selection) purposes while with (name of Registered Training Organisation/Institution)
- Collection of flora for display & education purposes for the (name of show) Wildflower Show
- Other (attach proposal):.....

Supporting documents (Note: the following documents will need to be provided with your application in the following circumstances, and then tick the declaration box below):

- **Confirmation of employment-** required when applying for a licence while employed by a company, educational institution or government (eg. covering letter or email from company supervisor)
- **Confirmation of studying status-** required when applying for a licence while studying with an Registered Training Organisation (covering letter or email from course supervisor)
- **Confirmation of membership with Community Group-** required when applying for a licence while with a Community Group (covering letter or email from head of group)

To the best of my knowledge I have attached all of the supporting documents required for my application

Land to which application relates

Whole of State- various locations not yet known (Note: once licensed you are required to obtain the permission of each Land Manager)

OR

Non-CALM managed lands (Note: once licensed you are required to obtain the permission of each Land Manager)

Name of Local Government Authority (eg. Shire, Town, City)	Location of Crown Land: (e.g. Reserve or Location No., name of Pastoral Station, or Reserve name)	Land Manager (Government Agency who manages the land)

DPaW managed lands

Specific name of land managed by DPaW (eg. State Forest, National Park, Nature Reserve, Marine Park, etc, or UCL-please provide description of location of UCL)	DPaW District

OR

List attached (specific locations known)

Note: For lands managed by DPaW (except UCL) a **Regulation 4 Authority** is required **in addition** to a Scientific or Other Prescribed Purposes licence. Please select one of the following:

- Application for a Regulation 4 Authority submitted with this application
- Already hold a Regulation 4 Authority for this location and project: **CE**.....
- Authorised under someone else’s Regulation 4 Authority which is for the same location and project: **CE**.....

Flora to which application relates

Identification material/Seed/Cuttings (circle your selection) for all flora except Declared Rare Flora

OR

Scientific Name (e.g. <i>Banksia prionotes</i>)	Common Name (if any)	Parts to be taken (e.g. Flowering Stems, Fruits/Nuts, Seeds, Leaves, Cuttings)

OR

List attached

Period for which licence will be required/duration of activity: (Maximum 12 months where activity is ongoing and frequent)

12 months from date of issue (ONLY if project is ongoing and frequent)

OR

Starting Date: _____ **Finishing Date:** _____

/ /

Signature of Applicant

Date

Payment (Please read the following and if you are still not sure whether you are eligible for a waived fee licence please contact Wildlife Licensing for confirmation):

The following situations are eligible for a waived fee licence when using the licence for these purposes:

- Government employees
- Regional Herbarium/WA Herbarium volunteers
- Students of educational institutions
- Community groups (where no sale of the flora is occurring)
- Registered DPaW volunteers
- Employees of educational institutions
- Wildflower Society members

If your activity does not fit in any of the above categories you are required to pay the \$10.00 application fee (Please select one of the following payment methods):

- Cheque enclosed Money order enclosed
- Payment made at DPaW office (refer to 'Office Use Only' section below)
- Credit Card (complete 'Credit Card Payment' section below)

No responsibility will be taken for cash payments sent via mail.

Credit Card Payment	(VISA & MASTERCARD ONLY)	**Please print clearly**
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>		
Name of Cardholder: _____		Expiry Date: ____/____
Signature of Cardholder: _____		

OFFICE USE ONLY

NAME OF RECEIPTING OFFICER:	RECEIPT NUMBER:
SIGNATURE:	DATE: / /
POSITION HELD & OFFICE LOCATION:	AMOUNT: \$.00



Flora Licensing Information Sheet

Scientific or Other Prescribed Purposes Licences

Completed forms should be returned to:

Department of Parks and Wildlife
Locked Bag 30 Bentley Delivery Centre WA 6983
Or faxed to (08) 9219 8242 or emailed.

Further information on the licensing requirements

is available from DPaW Wildlife Licensing Section

Phone: (08) 9219 9836

Email: wildlifelicencing@dpaw.wa.gov.au

All flora that is native to Western Australia is protected throughout the state under the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*. Protected flora is defined as any plant (including any wildflower, palm, shrub tree, fern, creeper or vine) and includes any part of a plant, including seeds and spores.

For information about the licensing requirements when taking flora for identification, research, education, hobby or other **non-commercial purposes**, please continue to read below.

Private Property

The taking of protected flora for **non-commercial purposes** from private property does not require a licence from DPaW, however you must obtain the landowner's permission prior to collection and collection must comply with relevant clearing legislation.

Persons who wish to **sell** flora taken from private property must hold a **Commercial Producer's (PN) Licence** (please refer to "Flora Licensing Information Sheet- Commercial Purposes and Commercial Producer's Licences" for more information).

Crown Land

To take protected flora from Crown land for **non-commercial purposes** a **Scientific or Other Prescribed Purposes (SOPP) Licence** is required. This licence covers activities such as identification, research, education, non-commercial propagation for local revegetation projects, or for hobby purposes.

A SOPP Licence must be held by **each person** taking flora.

The SOPP Licence alone does not permit the licensee to take flora from Crown land. Once a licence is issued, **written permission from the relevant Crown land manager** must be obtained prior to collection. If the land that the applicant wishes to collect on is DPaW managed (eg. National Park, Marine Park, Conservation Park, Regional Park, State Forest, Timber Reserve, Nature Reserve) the written permission comes in the form of a **Regulation 4 Authority** (please refer to "Flora Licensing Information Sheet- Collection of Flora from Lands Managed by DPaW" for more information).

The fee for a SOPP Licence is **\$10**, however the following situations are eligible for a **waived fee** licence:

- Government employees
- Registered DPaW volunteers
- Regional Herbarium/WA Herbarium volunteers
- Employees of educational institutions
- Students of educational institutions
- Community groups (where no sale of the flora is occurring)
- Wildflower Society members

A SOPP Licence is valid for the length of the project/activity, with a maximum period of one (1) year.

Persons who wish to take flora from Crown land for **commercial purposes** must hold a Commercial Purposes (CP) Licence (please refer to “Flora Licensing Information Sheet- Commercial Producer’s/Nurseryman’s Licences” for more information).

Renewal of Licences

The renewal of a licence is the responsibility of the licensee and will not automatically be granted. Each request for renewal is treated as a new application, so that in the event circumstances change, the appropriate licence conditions can be issued.

It is recommended that requests for renewal be sent **one (1) month** prior to the expiry date of the current licence to allow time for processing and posting.

Licence renewal is dependent all conditions have been adhered to, including the following:

Report

Renewal of a licence is dependent on the satisfactory submission of a report detailing collection activities (if it was a condition of the previous licence). Details of what must be included on the report are listed in the conditions of the licence, and (if required) an example report may be requested from the department’s Wildlife Licensing Section. Copies of any papers or reports resulting from the collection should also be submitted when completed.

Specimen Lodgement

A condition of a SOPP licence is that all holotypes and isotypes, where collected, and duplicate specimens of other material collected must be lodged at the Western Australian Herbarium (PERTH). It is recommended that you contact the Collection Manager at the WA Herbarium (08 9334 0500) to discuss vouchersing procedures and requirements prior to collection.

Understanding sediment

Seagrasses, especially structurally large species, affect coastal and reef water quality by trapping sediments and acting as a buffer between catchment inputs and reef communities. Seagrass meadows have the ability to modify the energy regimes of their environments, and help stabilise sediment by trapping and binding the sediment. However, the trapping ability of seagrass is in reality an equilibrium established between deposition/sedimentation and erosion/resuspension.

Studies have shown that sediment characteristics are important in determining seagrass growth, germination, survival, and distribution. As part of Seagrass-Watch, field descriptions of sediment type collected 0-2 cm below the sediment/water interface are determined by visual and tactile inspection of (wet) samples and constituents (primary descriptors) differentiated according to the Udden – Wentworth grade scale.

Grain size classes used, based on the Udden – Wentworth grade scale Wentworth, 1922.

	Fine-medium Clay	0 – 0.002 mm
	Coarse Clay	0.0021 – 0.004 mm
Mud	Very Fine Silt	0.0041– 0.008 mm
	Fine Silt	0.0081 – 0.016 mm
	Medium Silt	0.0161 – 0.031 mm
	Coarse Silt	0.0311 – 0.063 mm
	<hr/>	
	Very Fine Sand	0.0631 – 0.125 mm
	Fine Sand	0.1251 – 0.250 mm
Sand	Medium Sand	0.2501 – 0.500 mm
	Coarse Sand	0.5001 – 1.000 mm
	Very Coarse Sand	1.0001 – 2.000 mm
<hr/>		
Gravel	Granules	2.0001 – 4.000 mm
	Pebbles and larger	>4.0001 mm

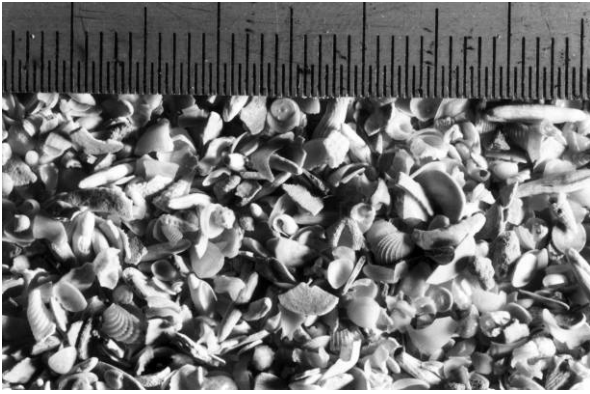
In Seagrass-Watch, the primary descriptors relate to the size of the sediment grains: gravel (>2000µm); coarse sand (>500 µm); sand (>250 µm); fine sand (>63 µm); and mud (<63 µm).

The sediment **Primary Descriptors** are written down from left to right in decreasing order of abundance: e.g. Mud/Sand is mud with sand, where mud is determined as the dominant constituent (by volume).

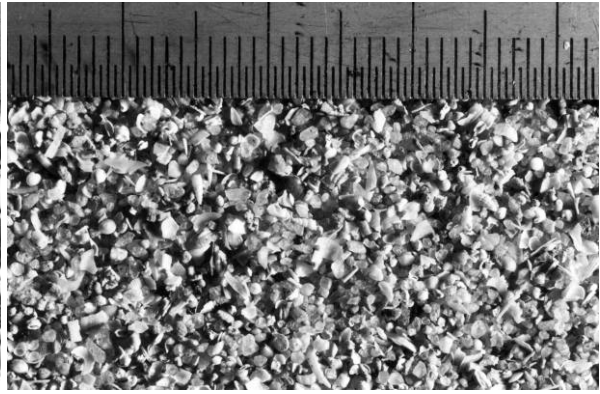
mud	<i>has a smooth and sticky texture.</i>
fine sand	<i>fairly smooth texture with some roughness just detectable. Not sticky in nature.</i>
sand	<i>rough grainy texture, particles clearly distinguishable.</i>
coarse sand	<i>coarse texture, particles loose.</i>
gravel	<i>very coarse texture, with some small stones.</i>

Sediment type **Modifiers** are also commonly used, however these are recorded in the comments section. Modifiers include: coral, shell grit, forams, diatoms, etc.

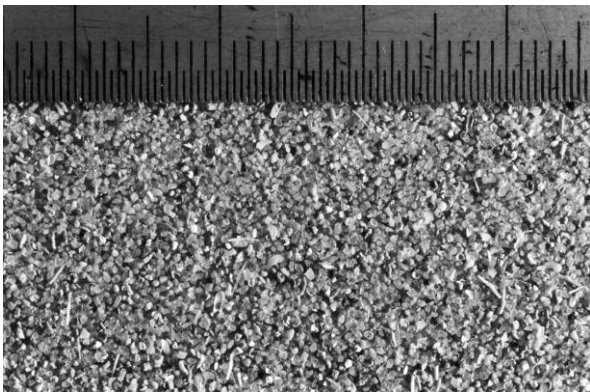
The visual/tactile estimation method used in Seagrass-Watch is a simple yet relatively accurate measure of the sediment grain size which can be used for quantitative assessments McKenzie, 2007b, http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/pdf/371_DPIF_McKenzie.pdf.



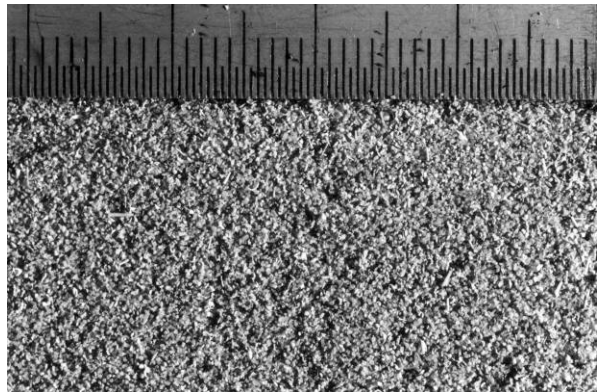
gravel (>2mm)



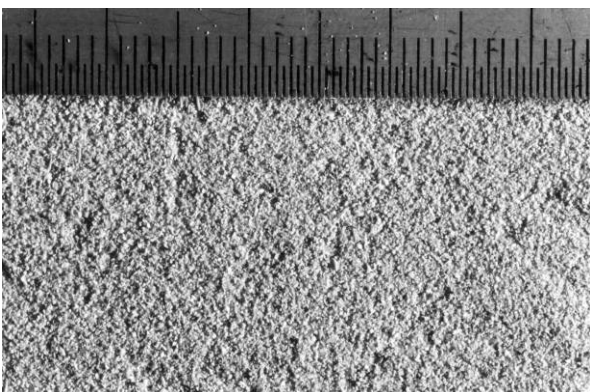
very coarse sand (1 – 2 mm)



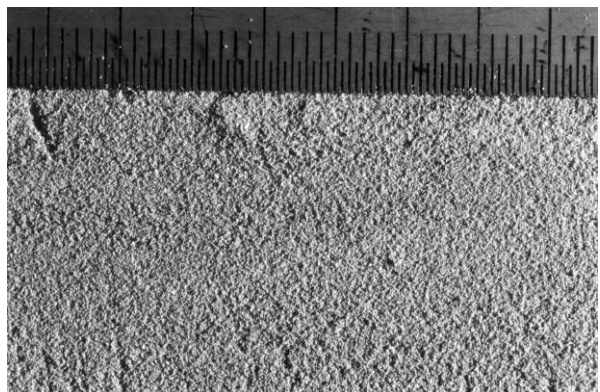
coarse sand (0.5 – 1 mm)



medium sand (0.25 – 0.5 mm)



fine sand (0.125 – 0.25 mm)



very fine sand (0.063 – 0.125mm)

Notes:

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Managing seagrass resources

Threats to seagrass habitats

Destruction or loss of seagrasses have been reported from most parts of the world, often from natural causes, e.g., "wasting disease" or high energy storms. However, destruction commonly has resulted from human activities, e.g., as a consequence of eutrophication or land clamation and changes in land use. Increases in dredging and landfill, construction on the shoreline, commercial overexploitation of coastal resources, and recreational boating activities along with anthropogenic nutrient and sediment loading has dramatically reduced seagrass distribution in some parts of the world. Anthropogenic impacts on seagrass meadows continue to destroy or degrade coastal ecosystems and decrease the function and value of seagrass meadows including their contribution to fisheries. It is possible global climate change will have a major impact. Efforts are being made toward rehabilitation of seagrass habitat in some parts of the world: transplantation, improvement of water quality, restrictions on boating activity, fishing and aquaculture, and protection of existing habitat through law and environmental policy.

Management

Seagrasses do not exist in nature as a separate ecological component from other marine plants and are often closely linked to other community types. In the tropics the associations are likely to be complex interactions with mangrove communities and coral reef systems. In temperate waters, algae beds, salt marshes, bivalve reefs, and epiphytic plant communities are closely associated with areas of seagrass. Many management actions to protect seagrasses have their genesis in the protection of wider ecological systems or are designed to protect the overall biodiversity of the marine environment.

Seagrasses are also food for several marine mammal species and turtles, some of which (such as the dugong *Dugong dugon* and green turtle *Chelonia mydas*) are listed as threatened or vulnerable to extinction in the IUCN Red List (www.iucnredlist.org). Seagrasses are habitat for juvenile fish and crustaceans that in many parts of the world form the basis of economically valuable subsistence and/or commercial fisheries. The need to manage fisheries in a sustainable way has itself become a motivating factor for the protection of seagrasses.

Methods of direct protection range from legislative instruments and associated legal sanctions through to education Coles and Fortes, 2001. These can be separated into three approaches: a proscriptive legal approach; a non-proscriptive broad based approach ranging from planning processes to education; and a reactive approach designed to respond to a specific issue such as a development proposal. These may overlap and be used simultaneously in many cases. It is these three approaches that Seagrass-Watch supports for the protection/conservation of seagrass.

Reactive (on-ground)

Reactive processes generally occur in response to a perceived operational threat such as a coastal development proposal Coles and Fortes, 2001. Reactive processes can include port contingency planning, risk management plans and environmental impact assessments.

Prescriptive (legal)

Prescriptive management of seagrass issues can range from local laws to a Presidential Decree, or Executive Order. Laws can directly safeguard seagrasses



or can protect them indirectly by protecting habitat types (all aquatic vegetation) or by influencing a process, e.g., prevention of pollution Coles and Fortes, 2001.

In some locations, protection is often strongest at the village or community level. This may be by Government supported agreements or through local management marine area level. In these cases successful enforcement is dependent on community support for the measure.

Non-prescriptive (planning & education)

Non-prescriptive methods of protecting seagrasses are usually part of planning processes and may have a strong extension/education focus Coles and Fortes, 2001. Providing information is important as it enables individuals to voluntarily act in ways that reduce impacts to seagrasses. Non-prescriptive methods range from simple explanatory guides to complex industry codes of practice.

Coastal management decision making is complex, and much of the information on approaches and methods exists only in policy and legal documents that are not readily available. There may also be local or regional Government authorities having control over smaller jurisdictions with other regulations and policies that may apply. Many parts of South East Asia and the Pacific Island nations have complex issues of land ownership and coastal sea rights. These are sometimes overlaid partially by arrangements put in place by colonising powers during and after World War II, leaving the nature and strength of protective arrangements open for debate.

Both Australia and the United States have developed historically as Federations of States with the result that coastal issues can fall under State or Federal legislation depending on the issue or its extent. In contrast, in Europe and much of South East Asia, central Governments are more involved. Intercountry agreements in these areas such as the UNEP Strategic Action Plan for the South China Sea and the Mediterranean Countries Barcelona Convention (<http://www.unep.org/>) are required to manage marine issues that encompass more than one country.

Approaches to protecting seagrass tend to be location specific or at least nation specific (there is no international legislation directly for seagrasses as such that we know of) and depend to a large extent on the tools available in law and in the cultural approach of the community. There is, however, a global acceptance through international conventions (RAMSAR Convention; the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals; and the Convention on Biodiversity) of the need for a set of standardised data/information on the location and values of seagrasses on which to base arguments for universal and more consistent seagrass protection.

Indigenous concepts of management of the sea differ significantly from the introduced European view of the sea as common domain, open to all and managed by governments (Hardin, 1968). Unlike contemporary European systems of management, indigenous systems do not include jurisdictional boundaries between land and sea. Indigenous systems have a form of customary ownership of maritime areas that has been operating in place for thousand of years to protect and manage places and species that are of importance to their societies.

Marine resource management these days should, therefore, attempt to achieve the following interrelated objectives: a) monitor the wellbeing (e.g. distribution, health and sustainability) of culturally significant species and environments (e.g. dugong, marine turtles, fish, molluscs, seagrass etc.); and b) monitor the cultural values associated with these culturally significant species and environments Smyth et al., 2006.

To realize objective a) we believe the following also needs to be accomplished if the successful management of coastal seagrasses is to be achieved.

1. Important fish habitat is known and mapped
2. Habitat monitoring is occurring
3. Adjacent catchment/watershed impacts and other threats are managed
4. Some level of public goodwill/support is present
5. Legal powers exist that are robust to challenge
6. There is effective enforcement and punishment if damage occurs

The key element is a knowledge base of the seagrass resource that needs to be protected and how stable/variable that resource is. It is also important to know if possible any areas that are of special value to the ecosystems that support coastal fisheries and inshore productivity. It is important as well that this information is readily available to decision makers in Governments in a form that can be easily understood.

Consequently a combination of modern “western” science and indigenous knowledge should be brought together within a co-management framework for the successful management of these resources Johannes, 2002; Gaskell, 2003; Aswani and Weiant, 2004; George et al., 2004; Turnbull, 2004; Middlebrook and Williamson, 2006. This can only occur if the resource owners actively involve themselves in the management of their resources. Western science also needs to recognise that resource owners have practical and spiritual connections with the resources found within their environment. Once this is recognized then this approach will have the added benefit of empowering communities who own the knowledge to be the primary managers and leaders in decisions about their land and sea country.

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Useful web links

Seagrass-Watch Official Site www.seagrasswatch.org

Seagrass Adventures Interactive website designed by students from Bentley Park College in Cairns (Australia). Website includes games, puzzles and quizzes for students to learn about seagrass and their importance. www.reef.crc.org.au/seagrass/index.html

World Seagrass Association A global network of scientists and coastal managers committed to research, protection and management of the world's seagrasses. wsa.seagrassonline.org

Seagrass Outreach Partnership Excellent website on seagrass of Florida. Provides some background information on seagrasses and has a great section with educational products and Seagrass Activity Kit for schools. www.flseagrass.org

Seagrass forum A global forum for the discussion of all aspects of seagrass biology and the ecology of seagrass ecosystems. Because of their complex nature, discussion on all aspects of seagrass ecosystems is encouraged, including: physiology, trophic ecology, taxonomy, pathology, geology and sedimentology, hydrodynamics, transplanting/restoration and human impacts. wwwscience.murdoch.edu.au/centres/others/seagrass/seagrass_forum.html

Reef Guardians and ReefEd Education site of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Includes a great collection of resources about the animals, plants, habitats and features of the Great Barrier Reef. Also includes an on-line encyclopedia, colour images and videos for educational use, a range of free teaching resources and activities. www.reefed.edu.au

Integration and Application Network (IAN) A website by scientists to inspire, manage and produce timely syntheses and assessments on key environmental issues, with a special emphasis on Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. Includes lots of helpful communication products such as fact sheets, posters and a great image library. ian.umces.edu

Reef Base A global database, information system and resource on coral reefs and coastal environments. Also extensive image library and online Geographic Information System (ReefGIS) which allows you to display coral reef and seagrass related data on interactive maps. www.reefbase.org

Western Australian Seagrass Webpage Mainly focused on Western Australian research, but provides some general information and links to international seagrass sites. wwwscience.murdoch.edu.au/centres/others/seagrass/

UNEP - World Conservation Monitoring Centre Explains the relationship between coral reefs, mangroves and seagrasses and contains world distribution maps. www.unep-wcmc.org

for more links, visit www.seagrasswatch.org/links.htm

We value your suggestions and any comments you may have to improve the Seagrass-Watch program.

Please complete the following statements in your own words

I found the Seagrass-Watch training to be
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What I enjoyed most about the training was.....
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It could have been better if.....
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I did not realize that.....
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Now I understand that.....
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In my area the types of seagrasses and habitats include.....
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