

Seagrass monitoring, Seagrass-Watch in Darwin Harbour

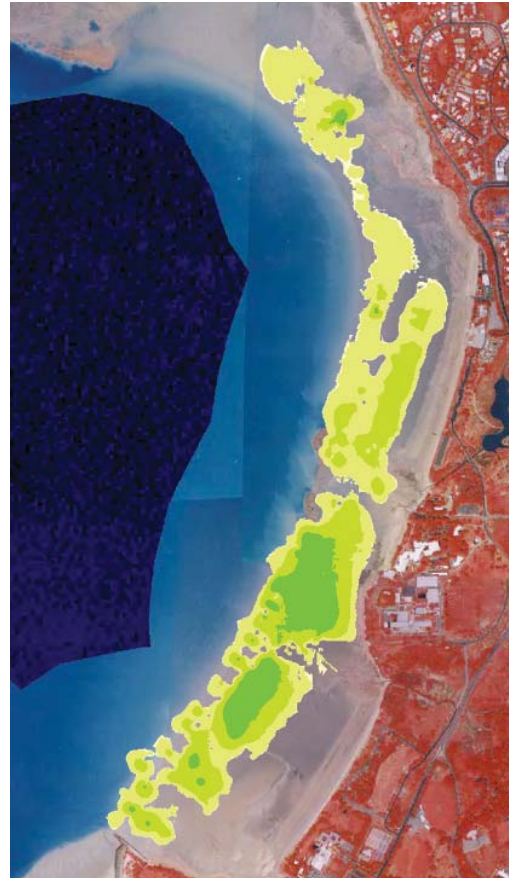
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Seagrasses live in the coastal waters of most of the world's continents. They are the main diet of dugongs and green turtles and provide a habitat for many, smaller marine animals, some of which, like prawns and fish, are commercially important. They also absorb nutrients from coastal run-off and stabilise sediment, helping to keep the water clear. Up to as many as 10 species (or 14%) of the world's seagrass species are endangered due to coastal developments and habitat loss.

Seagrasses are unique amongst flowering plants, in that almost all of the 72 species can live entirely immersed in seawater. Seagrass meadows in Darwin Harbour are located off Casuarina and Vestey's Beaches and are dominated by two common species: *Halodule uninervis* and *Halodule pinifolia*. These are favourite food for dugongs and are why we often see these wonderful animals in the harbour.

As part of an enhanced monitoring program in Darwin Harbour, a new program is being established for seagrass. The program will join Seagrass-Watch, a global scientific, non-destructive, seagrass assessment and monitoring program. It was established in 1998 in Australia, and is now conducted at approximately 260 sites across 17 countries.

Seagrass-Watch aims to raise awareness on the condition and trend of near-shore seagrass ecosystems and involves collaboration and partnerships between community, qualified scientists and the data users.



Seagrass meadow distribution for Fannie Bay and Mindil beach areas.



Dugong (Dugong dugong). A frequent visitor to Darwin Harbour. Better knowledge of habitat use by dugongs and other species in the harbour is a priority area for future research to help protect them from habitat loss, boat strikes and pollution.