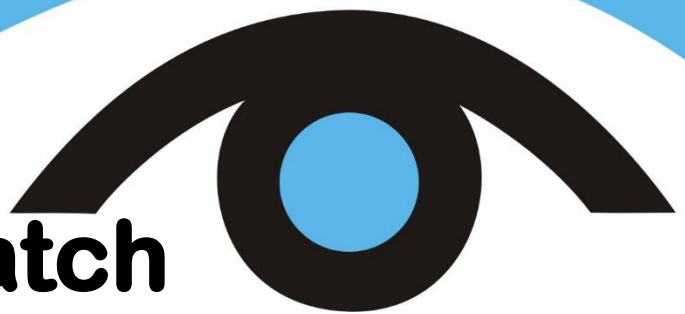




# Seagrass-Watch

Proceedings of a workshop for monitoring  
seagrass in Dhimurru Sea Country

*Nhulunbuy, Northern Territory  
12-14 February 2025*



Len McKenzie & Rudi Yoshida

First Published 2025

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Front cover photos: (left and right) Seagrass-Watch monitoring in *Enhalus acoroides* meadow on intertidal banks of Melville Bay (Oct08, by Len McKenzie); (centre) *Enhalus acoroides* leaves closeup (Oct06, by Rudi Yoshida).

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Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation  
11 Arnhem Rd, Nhulunbuy NT 0880



Field exercise site in No Name Bay, located opposite mining ponds.

We acknowledge Australia's First Nations People as the first original inhabitants and traditional custodians of this continent, and acknowledge the various Yolŋu clans across north eastern Arnhem Land as the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the land and sea on which we conduct this workshop. We pay our respects to ancestors and elders, past, present and emerging.

# Overview

Seagrass-Watch is a global seagrass observing network, where scientists, coastal managers and local stakeholders from across the globe collaborate to assess the status of their seagrass meadows to provide an early warning of coastal ecological decline. The program started in 1998 in Australia, using standardised global monitoring protocols, and has so far expanded to include 429 sites across 33 countries. Anyone can participate in Seagrass-Watch, as it responds to local needs, and includes some elements of citizen science. Seagrass-Watch is a monitoring program that brings people together for seagrass conservation.

Seagrass-Watch implements a globally standardised seagrass assessment and monitoring protocol, that has a rigorous quality assurance and quality control procedure to ensure data is of the highest quality and that time and resources are not wasted. The only condition is that on-ground data collection must be overseen by a qualified scientist or trained and competent participant (18 years or over). The program 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 a better understanding of coastal issues within the broader community,*
- *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 for experienced participants who plan to lead a seagrass monitoring event or conduct seagrass extension activities in Dhimurru IPA Sea Country. 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 mapping and monitoring activities. For further information, please do not hesitate to contact us at

**Seagrass-Watch HQ**

PO Box 4  
Clifton Beach QLD 4879  
AUSTRALIA  
E-mail [hq@seagrasswatch.org](mailto:hq@seagrasswatch.org)



Photo: Fergus Kennedy

# Workshop trainers



## Len McKenzie

Len is the Director and Chief Scientist of Seagrass-Watch, and a Principal Researcher with James Cook University. He is a seagrass Technical Advisor for the CMS Dugong MoU, the Project Manager of the Inshore Seagrass component of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Monitoring Program and principal investigator 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, resource mapping/ assessment and biodiversity. He has provided information on seagrass ecosystems that has been vital in management of seagrass resources of the Great Barrier Reef, South East Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Len is a qualified trainer and assessor (Cert IV TAE40110). Len is also the Secretary of the World Seagrass Association.

### **Current Projects**

- Seagrass-Watch
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Monitoring Program: inshore seagrass
- Status and mapping of seagrass resources in Queensland and Globally
- Seagrass resilience: seagrass connectivity, community composition and growth
- Conservation of biodiversity, seagrass ecosystems and their services – safeguarding food security and resilience in vulnerable coastal communities in a changing climate



## Rudi Yoshida

Rudi is the Data Manager of Seagrass-Watch and a Researcher at James Cook University. Rudi has over 20 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 and assists with training workshops.

### **Current Projects**

- Seagrass-Watch
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Monitoring Program: inshore seagrass

# Agenda - Level 1 (basic)

## Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2025

0830 – 0900 (30min)	Registration
0900 - 0915 (15min)	Welcome & Introduction
0915 - 0945 (30min)	Seagrass Biology and Taxonomy*
0945 - 1030 (45min)	Seagrass Identification
1030 - 1100 (30min)	<i>Break</i>
1100 - 1145 (45min)	Seagrass Identification <i>continued</i> *
1145 - 1230 (45min)	Seagrass Biology 2 and Ecology
1230 - 1315 (45min)	<i>Lunch</i>
1315 - 1445 (90min)	Seagrass importance*
1445 - 1515 (30min)	Seagrass monitoring*
1515 - 1530 (15min)	Wrap up for day

## Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2025

0930 - 0945 (15min)	recap day 1
0945 - 1100 (75min)	Seagrass-Watch: how to sample
1100 - 1130 (30min)	<i>Break</i>
1130 - 1245 (75min)	Seagrass-Watch: how to sample 2*
1245 - 1300 (15min)	Risk assessment
1300 - 1400 (60min)	<i>Lunch &amp; relocate to field site</i>
1400 - 1630 (2hrs 30min)	<b>Field exercise:</b> Seagrass-Watch monitoring (Low tide 1605 0.8)
1630 - 1645 (15min)	Wrap up for day

## Friday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2025

0900-0915 (15min)	recap day 2
0915-1015 (60min)	Seagrass threats*
1015-1030 (15min)	Seagrass-Watch: QAQC
1030-1100 (30min)	<i>Break</i>
1100-1130 (30min)	Seagrass-Watch: QAQC <i>continued</i>
1130-1215 (45min)	Seagrass-Watch: how data is used*
1215-1300 (45min)	Discussion & <b>Workshop close</b>



# Assessment requirements

To successfully attain a **Certificate of Achievement**, you will need to demonstrate you have the knowledge, skills, abilities and experience to competently conduct monitoring using Seagrass-Watch protocols.

Successful achievement must to be demonstrated across 9 core units, by completing:

- 1 a training workshop (classroom, laboratory and field), and
- 2 three post workshop monitoring events (within 12 months)

## Training workshop (6 units)

*Demonstrates you have the knowledge, skills and abilities to conduct monitoring*

**Classroom** (4 units): attendance + achieve 80% of formal assessment (multiple choice, open book)

**Laboratory** (1 unit): identify 3 local seagrass species correctly and demonstrate how to preserve seagrass samples for an herbarium

**Field** (1 unit): perform the following to the satisfaction of the trainer:

- layout a site and quadrat placement
- description of sediment & comments
- estimation of seagrass cover
- identification of seagrass species
- estimation of seagrass species composition
- measuring seagrass canopy height
- estimation of macro algae cover
- estimation of epiphyte cover
- taking a quadrat photo
- accurately record data

## 3 post workshop monitoring events (3 units)

*Demonstrates you have the experience and competency to conduct monitoring on your own*

Must be completed within 12 months: starting no sooner than 1 month after the training workshop. Tentative monitoring events (dates) to be nominated within 1 month of a training workshop. Minimum of 1 site, maximum of 5 sites, per monitoring event assessed. Sites must be sampled within a 2-week period each sampling event. Each monitoring event/period must be separated by at least 1 month, regardless of number of sites monitored. Each participant must assess a minimum of 1 transect per site per sampling event (name must be clearly legible on field datasheet). *A Certified participant can oversee data collection, however, participant being assessed must collect the required data along transect and the name of Certified participant must be clearly legible on datasheet.*

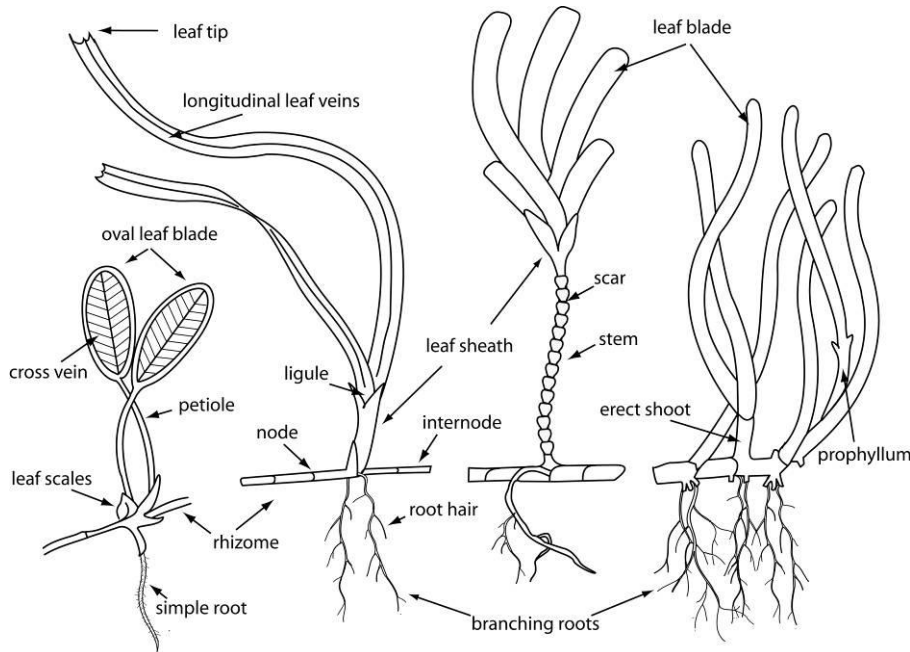
Original datasheets, photos, etc., must be submitted to Seagrass-Watch HQ within 2 weeks after each monitoring event. Data submitted must be compliant and must pass QAQC by achieving the following:

- correct description of sediment & comments
- seagrass cover estimates within acceptable limits
- correct seagrass species identification
- correct seagrass species compositions
- correct seagrass canopy height measures
- macro algae cover estimates within acceptable limits
- epiphyte cover estimates within acceptable limits
- compliant quadrat photos

Once all QAQC has been completed and the participant has demonstrated they have the skills, ability, experience and competency to conduct monitoring, a certificate will be issued by Seagrass-Watch HQ.

# 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 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), rhizome, 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.

These marine plants 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), a fern, a long spaghetti/noodle form and a ribbon. Species that have a paddle or fern shaped leaf are of the genera *Halophila*. Ones that have a ribbon shaped leaf are the *Cymodocea*, *Oceana*, *Thalassia*, *Thalassodendron*, *Halodule* and *Nanozostera*. 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 underside 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 plant. Leaves have a very thin cuticle, which allows gas and some nutrient

Seagrass are marine flowering plants

Seagrasses have roots, stems and leaves

Seagrass is different to seaweed (algae) as seagrass have internal vascular system, 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 rhizomes so they can carry water, food and absorb gases

diffusion into them from the surrounding water. Seagrass leaves also contain **veins** (lignified conducting tissue) that **transports water, nutrients and photosynthetic products 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 **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 (in the sediments), facilitating nutrient uptake.

Seagrasses are flowering plants (angiosperms) which 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 are angiosperms. They have flowers, fruits and seeds

Pollination occurs in the water

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

Seagrasses are not true grasses

Seagrasses evolved approximately 100 million years ago from land plants that returned to the sea in at least four separate lineages. 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.

### 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% of surface irradiance on average, 4.4% minimum and 29% maximum depending on species) 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 CO<sub>2</sub> concentration. The cause of thermal stress at higher temperatures (38°C to 42°C) is the disruption of electron transport 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 (CO<sub>2</sub>) concentrations in the water column; factors critical in plant survival in the marine environment.

Seagrasses are more 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 temperatures above 40°C will stress tropical seagrass, and death occurs at temperatures above 43°C

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 ( $\text{HCO}_3^-$ ) as an inorganic carbon source (e.g. *Halophila ovalis*, *Cymodocea rotundata*, *Syringodium isoetifolium* and *Thalassia*), whereas others use enzymes to make  $\text{CO}_2$  available as the inorganic carbon source (e.g. *Enhalus acoroides*, *Halodule*, *Oceana 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 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 clay 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* spp. 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 and dispersal of vegetative material and seeds depends on currents. 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 sheltered 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.

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.

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

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 area, food and shelter 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 sand crabs 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](#) (wet weight) of seagrass a day while an adult dugong eats about 28 to 40 kilograms (wet weight) 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 > Enhalus acoroides](#). In sub-tropical and temperate areas, water birds such as black swans also eat seagrass.

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

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 productivity of ecosystems via the detrital food pathway

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 seagrasses bind sediments** on the substrate, and nutrients are recycled by microorganisms back into the marine ecosystem. The leaves of seagrasses 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 nutrient laden sediments or filtering nutrient and chemical inputs** to the marine environment. Seagrasses uptake nitrogen and phosphorus from coastal run-off that, in over abundance, 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 goods and benefits (contributions) is a controversial topic in today's literature. Ecosystem services are the structures and processes by which the environment produces contributions to our quality of life, 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 goods they provide has been estimated at US\$ 28,916 ha<sup>-1</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup> (in 2007 dollars).

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

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

### 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 herbivory; 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 and clams](#) 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 and recolonisation. Following such events, a shift to more ephemeral species and those with lower minimum light requirements is expected.

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

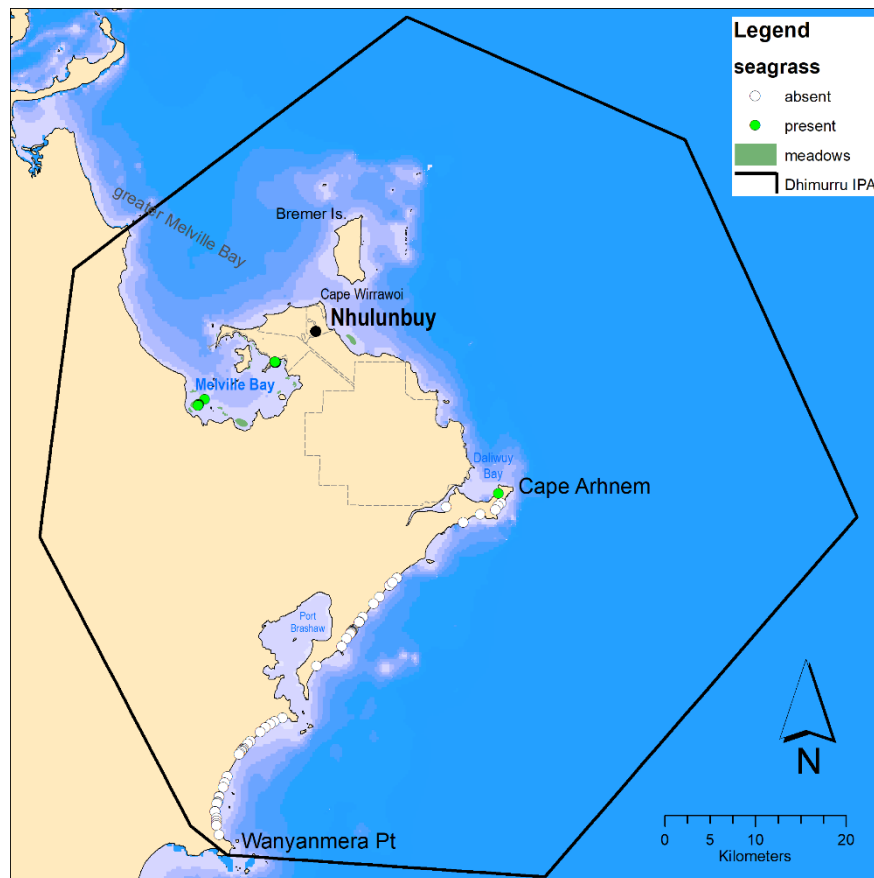
Climate change can threaten intertidal seagrass by increased seawater temperature and greater physical disturbance from storms



# Seagrass in Dhimurru Sea Country

Updated from [1]

The Yolŋu people of the Dhuwa and Yirritja clans are the Custodians and Traditional Owners of land and sea estates in the Gove Peninsula region of North East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. The Yolŋu people’s relationship with the sea and its resources is fundamental to their religious, social and economic life and wellbeing [2]. In 2000, the Yolŋu in North East Arnhem announced the dedication of some 101,000 hectares of land (92,000 ha) and marine (9,000 ha) estate surrounding the Gove Peninsula for inclusion in the Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) (Figure 1). It was the first IPA in Australia to include both land and sea. In April 2013, Yolŋu Wanga Watangu (Traditional Owners) formally dedicated additional areas of their land and sea country to the Dhimurru IPA, which included sea country extending 40km out to sea from the coastline [3]. Dhimurru IPA sea country covers 432,596 hectares, and managed by the Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation; an indigenous community based natural and cultural resource management agency [4]. The sustainable management of Dhimurru sea country in which the Yolŋu custodians’ rights and responsibilities and interests are recognised and respected is the Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporations highest priority.



**Figure 1.** Seagrass meadows and points where seagrass have been observed within the Dhimurru IPA sea country.

The broader Arnhem Land region consists of the eastern half of the large peninsula that forms the northernmost portion of the Northern Territory. The region, with a total area of about 95,900 km<sup>2</sup>, consists of a ruggedly dissected plateau and associated lowlands. The coast of Arnhem Land extends from Van Diemen Gulf and the Cobourg Peninsula eastward to Gove Peninsula, the Gulf of Carpentaria south east to the Roper River, and Groote Eylandt. The climate is characterised by a tropical monsoon with a distinct wet season starting in November/December and lasting for approximately four months followed by a dry season. Cyclonic activity is low to moderate [5].

Although no area on earth is unaffected by human influence, Arnhem Land is located in one of the least impacted regions globally <sup>[6]</sup>. Northern Australia is part of the global centre for marine biodiversity. The drivers of anthropogenic change are mostly much less in northern Australia than in the remainder of the Indo-Pacific. Australia as the only developed country in the region has a global responsibility for the conservation of marine biodiversity.

Local Yolŋu people hold much of the biological knowledge of Dhimurru IPA sea country. Very little marine research has been conducted and consequently there is very little known about the distribution and abundance of marine flora and fauna, including seagrasses within the IPA and the broader Arnhem Land coastline <sup>[7,8]</sup>. Much of the information has been based on anecdotal evidence from the 1970s <sup>[9,10]</sup>, surveys from fixed wing aircraft in the 1980s <sup>[11]</sup> or helicopter in the early 2000s <sup>[12]</sup>, and surveys required for Environmental Impact Statements related to Port and mining develop activities <sup>[13]</sup>.

Seagrass meadows in the Dhimurru IPA Sea Country play a vital role in supporting coastal marine communities and in maintaining diverse flora and fauna. The meadows support dugong (*Dugong dugon*) and green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), which are of particular cultural interest to Yolŋu people <sup>[14]</sup>. Seagrasses are critical to the survival of these animals. The status of the dugongs in this region, however, is uncertain <sup>[15]</sup>. During an extensive megafauna survey of the Northern Territory's coastal waters, no dugongs were observed within the IPA. However, the estimated population of dugongs for the survey block stretching from just north of Blue Mud Bay to the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf (which encompasses the IPA) was 2,648 ±318 individuals, with a density ≤ 0.11 dugongs per km<sup>2</sup> <sup>[16]</sup>.

The meadows also provide a range of other important ecological goods and benefits. Seagrass produce natural biocides and improve water quality by controlling pathogenic bacteria to the benefit of humans, fishes, and marine invertebrates <sup>[17]</sup>. Nutrient cycling in seagrass meadows makes them one of the most economically valuable ecosystems in the world and the retention of carbon within their sediments contributes significantly to Blue Carbon sequestration <sup>[18-21]</sup>. The ecosystem contributions provided by seagrass therefore makes them a high conservation priority <sup>[22,23]</sup>.

To date, six seagrass species have been reported from the Dhimurru IPA sea country, including: *Enhalus acoroides* (L.f.) Royle, 1839; *Halophila decipiens* Ostenfeld, 1902; *Halophila minor* (Zoll.) Hartog, 1957; *Halophila ovalis* (R.Brown) Hooker f., 1858; *Halodule uninervis* (Forssk.) Asch., 1882; *Halodule pinifolia* (Miki) Hartog.

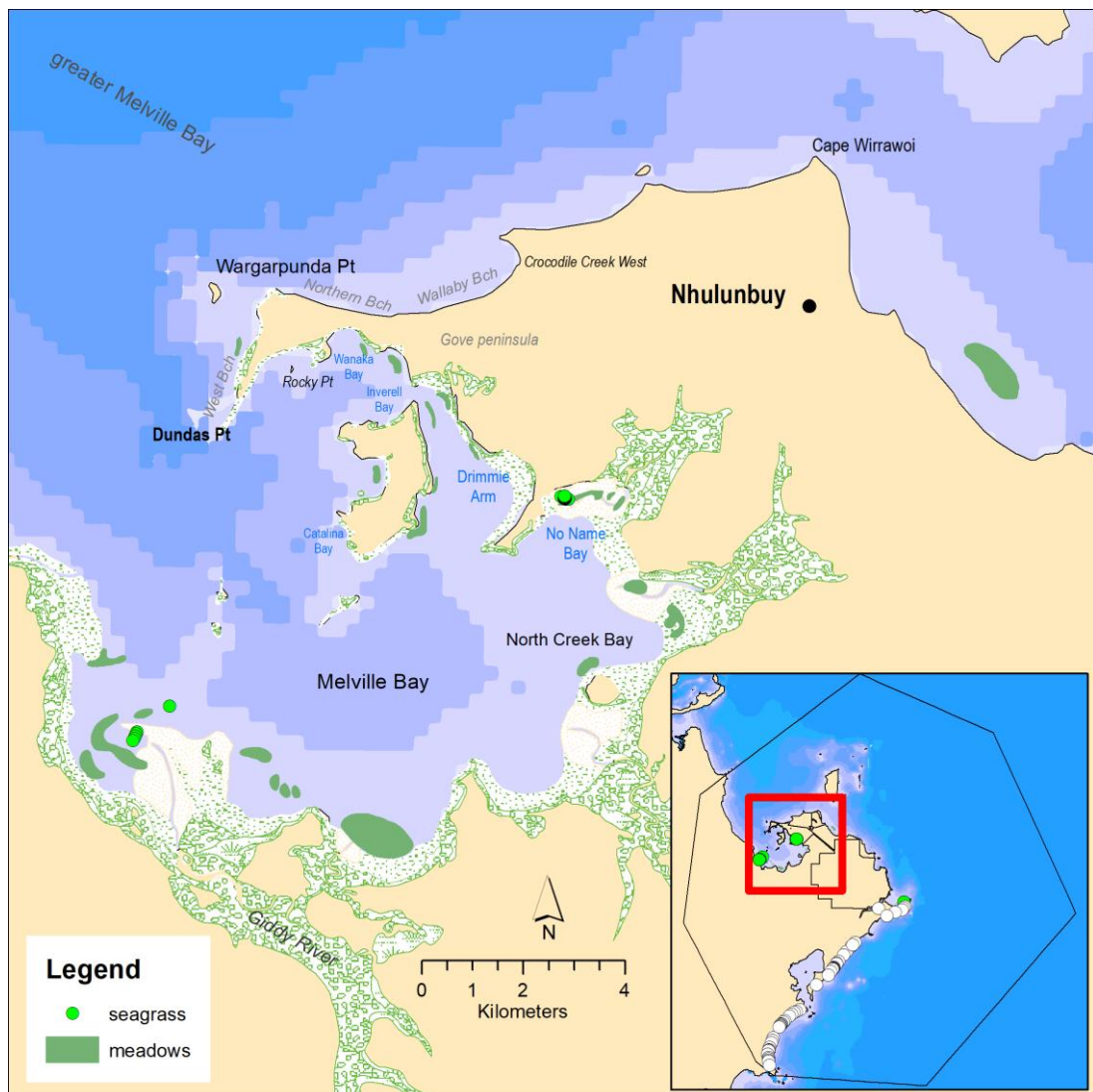
However, beyond the Dhimurru IPA, an additional six other seagrass species have been reported from the waters surrounding the broader Arnhem Land <sup>[11-13]</sup>, including: *Oceana serrulata* (R.Brown) Byng & Christenhusz 2018 (Syn.: *Cymodocea serrulata* (R.Br.) Asch. & Magnus); *Cymodocea rotundata* Asch. & Schweinf., 1870; *Halophila spinulosa* (R.Brown) Ascherson, 1875; *Syringodium isoetifolium* (Ascherson) Dandy, 1939; *Thalassia hemprichii* (Ehrenb. ex Solms) Asch., 1871; *Thalassodendron ciliatum* (Forssk.) Hartog, 1970. *H. uninervis* and *H. ovalis* are by far the most common on the open sand and mud flats. *T. hemprichii* and *T. ciliatum* are often found on reef platforms and around rocky islands. *E. acoroides* often occurs in shallow sheltered bays and estuarine areas of the wet tropics of northern Australia and the central Indo-West Pacific region. The other seagrass species found in Melville Bay are also common in many subtidal areas across tropical northern Australia.

Most species in the region are classified as colonising or opportunistic, capable of rapid recovery from losses due to fast asexual growth rates and capacity for generating large seed banks <sup>[24]</sup>. No seagrass species are listed as Endangered, Vulnerable, Near Threatened or Data Deficient under the IUCN Red List criteria <sup>[25]</sup>.

## Melville Bay

Melville Bay is adjacent to Nhulunbuy (pop. 3,267), the fourth largest population in the Northern Territory [26]. Melville Bay is the large embayment, approximately 170 km<sup>2</sup> in area, located in the southern section of the broader Melville Bay region; which extends from Sandy Bay in the north to Cape Wirrawoi (Wirrawuy) in the east, covering 353 km<sup>2</sup> [27].

Melville Bay is fringed by mangroves, with several coarse sandy beaches and some rocky shores. There are small rocky islands and headlands in the northern part of the bay. The water in the bay is shallow, rarely more than 15 m in depth and mostly less than 10 m. Approximately 10.8 km<sup>2</sup> of intertidal flats occur within the bay. The tidal range is 4 m and on most low spring tides some of the shallow arms of the Bay dry out. The substrate over most of the bay is fine mud and silts, typically anoxic, and seagrasses are present, but patchy in distribution [28, 29].



**Figure 2.** Seagrass meadows and points where seagrass have been observed within and adjacent to Melville Bay ([13]; Seagrass-Watch, unpublished data).

Along the northern side of Melville Bay, is the Gove peninsula where the RTA Gove alumina refinery is located. The RTA Gove bauxite mine at Nhulunbuy lies inland and the ore is transported by conveyor to the Gove peninsula. There have been a number of reports examining RTA Gove’s and previous owners (e.g., Alcan Gove and Nabalco) operations and potential environmental impacts on the region [30-35]. Concerns in the past have included the level of sulphur emissions from the Steam Power Station stacks, the discharge of heated seawater into the Bay, occasional spills of caustic soda into the Bay [30], and heavy metal contamination of oysters in Melville Bay.

Apart from the possible impact of RTA Gove operations on the bay, there are several other sources of concern. A barge landing facility and a fuel depot for commercial vessels are located between Dundas Point and Rocky Point. Further to the east, lies the recreational yacht club in Inverell Bay. This area is characterized by poor circulation, especially since the construction of a causeway during World War II has restricted the flow of seawater through the northern end of Drimmie Arm <sup>[29]</sup>.

Hanley <sup>[29]</sup> first reported that seagrasses were mostly of the *Halophila* species, although several other species occur. To date, six seagrass species have been reported from the Dhimurru IPA sea country, including: *Enhalus acoroides*, *Halophila decipiens*, *Halophila ovalis*, *H. minor*<sup>1</sup>, *H. uninervis* and *H. pinifolia*. However, as herbarium specimens are lacking for the region, taxonomic verification is limited.

Seagrass meadows span approximately 278.4 ha (temporal composite) within Melville Bay. In 2003, the densest seagrass meadows in south-eastern Melville Bay were found in the northern part of No Name Bay. These were meadows of *Enhalus acoroides* that fringe the rim of the shallow basin and form smaller clumps within the basin itself. In July 2017, Dhimurru rangers examined 26 quadrats haphazardly placed in the *Enhalus acoroides* meadow adjacent to the mining ponds and reported an average cover of  $7.1 \pm 1.0\%$  (Dhimurru, unpublished data). This suggests that significant changes have occurred over the last decade or so. *Enhalus* typically occurs just beneath the low spring water tide level, revealing their leaves during most low tides. Less-dense but more extensive *Enhalus* meadows occur around the southern rim of Melville Bay, in North Creek Bay and on the western side of the entrance channel to the Giddy River, while patchy clumps have also been found along the north-west side of Drimmie Arm.

Patchy meadows of *Halophila* species are present in several areas. *Halophila decipiens* has been recorded fringing the *Enhalus* meadows in No Name Bay, in small meadows to south and west of Dundas Point, and in Gove Harbour where they are found to the north-east of Harbour Islet, on the north-eastern sides of Wanaka Bay, and in Inverell Bay. *Halophila decipiens* was also observed during a Port baseline survey for introduced marine pests within Catalina Bay <sup>[36]</sup>. It has also been found in parts of Drimmie Arm and off Knoll Island and Dolphin Rocks. *Halophila ovalis* and *H. minor* are occasionally present in the Dundas Point meadows. Patchy but well developed *H. ovalis* has also been recorded on sandy substrates in 3-7 m depths in the channel east of West Woody Island and between Wargarpunda Point and Wallaby Beach. Turbidity in Gove Harbour and southern Melville Bay appears to restrict *Halophila* to depths that are 0-3 m below the mean low water spring tide level.

*Halodule* species (the narrow form of *H. uninervis* and/or *H. pinifolia*) is found in small patches to the north-east of the main harbour jetty. A small patchy meadow mixed with *Halophila decipiens* has also been reported off the west side of Rocky Point.

On the exposed northern side of Gove Peninsula, the shores are rockier with extensive sandy beaches. Between Dundas Point and Wargarpunda Point, isolated patches of *Halophila* covering around 3.5 ha were reported along West Beach <sup>[13]</sup>. However, no seagrass has been reported adjacent to Northern or Wallaby Beaches, and the area between Lombuy (Crocodile Creek West) and Cape Wirawawoi has yet to be surveyed.

To support the establishment of a long-term monitoring program to address potential impacts of the cooling water discharge of the Alcan Gove refinery on the marine environment in Melville Bay, a baseline assessment of shallow (<8 m water depth) marine habitats within and around Melville Bay was conducted using a low-voltage underwater video system towed behind a vessel from 30-Oct-2007 to 08-Nov-2007 (Figure 3) <sup>[37]</sup>. The field work was conducted towards the end

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<sup>1</sup> Seagrass taxonomy has changed through time, with species such as *Halophila ovata* no longer recognized, and considered synonymous with *Halophila minor*.

of the dry season, in light to moderate sea conditions and neap tides after the full moon. Seagrass species were identified from the imagery by morphology and were reported to occur in mono-specific assemblages. The percentage cover of benthic communities was classified as follows: sparse (0 - 30% cover), medium (30 - 60%) and dense (>60%) [37].



**Figure 3.** Location of underwater video tows within and adjacent to Melville Bay, 30-Oct-2007 to 08-Nov-2007[37].

No survey of seagrass distribution has been undertaken in broader Melville Bay region from around the harbour limits near Shepherd Bluff north to Sandy Bay.

The meadows with Melville Bay support megafauna of cultural importance, such as dugong and crocodile. For example, a dugong pair (cow and calf) was sighted feeding in the meadow off West Beach in approximately 5 m of water in July 2002. Dugongs and crocodiles have also been frequently observed in Drimmie Arm and No Name Bay as a result of the presence of seagrass and mangrove habitats.

### **Cape Wirawoi (Wirrawuy) to Wanyanmera Point**

A seagrass meadow covering approximately 64 ha was reported in the shallow waters between Gumuniya (Buffalo Creek) and Baṅambarrŋa (Rainbow Cliff) [13], however, details regarding when the observation was made and what species, etc, has not been accessible at this stage.

On November 17, 2004, a total of 55 points along the Dhimurru IPA exposed coast, stretching from Daliwuy Bay (Cape Arnhem) to Wanyanmera Point (excluding Port Bradshaw (Guyunga)), were assessed using a low flying helicopter as part of a broadscale survey of the Gulf of Carpentaria's intertidal seagrass [12]. The only seagrass that was reported was aggregated patches of *Halophila ovalis* covering around 1 ha, in a shallow embayment located in north east Daliwuy Bay (Binydjarrŋa). A dugong was also sighted in the bay during the survey.

On December 4, 2013, Dhimurru rangers conducted an assessment of seagrass at Guyunga, located in the northern part of Port Bradshaw. This shallow and sheltered embayment, found within the southern Dhimurru IPA, is frequented by small vessels, and two homelands are situated near its entrance; Bawuka on the northern shore, and Dhanaya on the south west. Three seagrass species (*Enhalus acoroides*, *Halodule uninervis* and *Halophila ovalis*) were observed at the site and the seagrass was reported to look very healthy overall [38]. Numerous invertebrates, such as shrimp and hermit crabs, along with a small sea snake, were spotted within the seagrass meadow. The *Enhalus* was also flowering at the time, with an abundance of male flowers observed floating on the water's surface [38].

Similar to other shallow sheltered bays within the Dhimurru IPA, the meadows of Port Bradshaw support culturally important megafauna and coastal marine communities. For example, near Dhanaya, a resident population of dugong and a large number of saltwater crocodiles have been reported. Marine sea turtles frequent the bay as do dolphins, manta rays, mullet, trevally, saw fish and many other species of marine fauna.

## SEAGRASS-WATCH IN DHIMURRU SEA COUNTRY

To understand the status of seagrass ecosystems and to provide an early warning of change, long-term monitoring sites were established in the meadows adjacent to Giddy River in October 2008 and Port Bradshaw (Guyunga) in December 2009. Establishing a network of monitoring sites provides valuable information on temporal trends in the health status of seagrass meadows in the region and provides a tool for custodians in adopting protective measures. The following is a summary of the current status of Seagrass-Watch monitoring in Dhimurru sea country.

### Giddy River

**Monitoring:** ongoing

**Principal watchers:** Dhimurru Sea Rangers

**Occasional and past watchers:** Vanessa Walsh, Neil Smit, Seagrass-Watch HQ

**Location:** located 1.5 km Giddy River mouth, on large intertidal bank on western side of Melville Bay, 1.5km east of Gangurimurru Beach

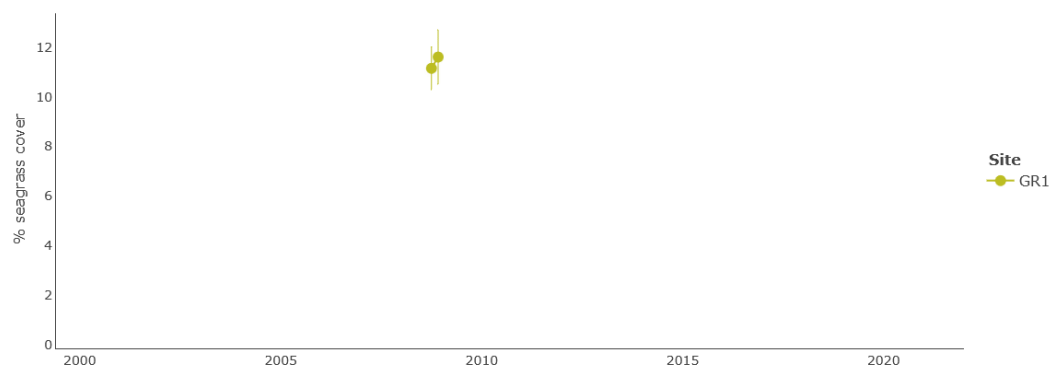
**Site codes:** GR1

**GR1 position:** S12.26372 E136.65942 (heading: 40 degrees)

**Best tides:** <0.5m Gove Harbour (Port 63480)

#### Seagrass Status (Dec08):

- Long-term monitoring site established in 18 October 2008
- monitoring site was last assessed on 15 December 2008
- insufficient data to determine seagrass condition



- The monitoring site is dominated by the persistent species *Enhalus acoroides*, with <1% composition of the colonising species *Halophila ovalis*.
- Canopy height is between 50 and 70cm.
- Epiphyte cover on seagrass leaves varies from 30-35% on average.
- Macro-algae abundance is generally low, between 2 to 25%.
- For more information, visit <https://www.seagrasswatch.org/northernterritory/#GR>

**Port Bradshaw (Guyunga)**

**Monitoring:** ongoing

**Principal watchers:** Dhimurru Sea Rangers

**Occasional and past watchers:** Vanessa Drysdale, Lisa Roeger

**Location:** located 4 km north of Gulurunga, near Bawuka, on the left intertidal bank of the creek mouth adjacent to the mangroves

**Site codes:** BR1

**BR1 position:** S12.45887 E136.76741 (heading: 135 degrees)

**Best tides:** <0.5m Cape Arnhem (Port 63490)

**Seagrass Status (Dec13):**

- Long-term monitoring site established in 15 December 2009
- monitoring site was last assessed on 04 December 2013
- insufficient data to determine seagrass condition
- In 2013, average seagrass abundance was 42.9 ±3.9% and the canopy height 20 ±2 cm on average
- The monitoring site in 2013 was dominated by *Halodule uninervis* (50%), followed by *Enhalus acoroides* (34%) and *Halophila ovalis* (16%)
- not all data has passed QAQC, restricting ability to make comparisons with 2009 assessment.

**Notes:**

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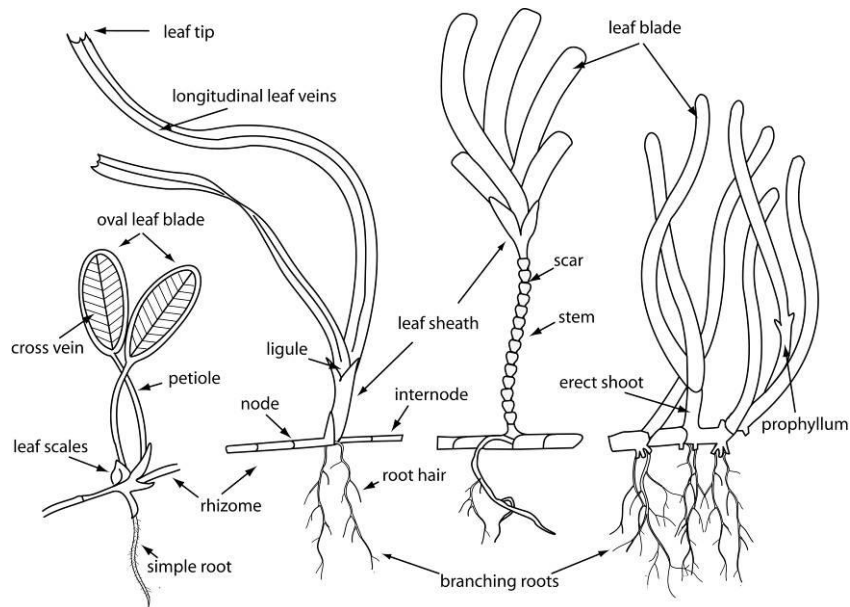
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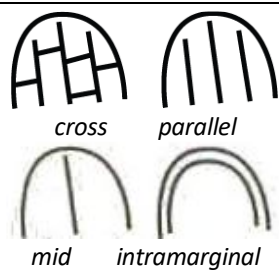

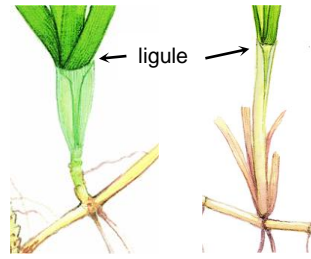

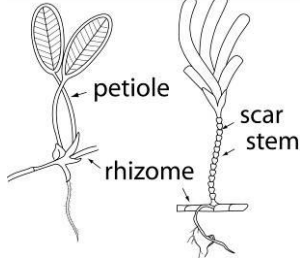
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# Parts of a seagrass plant

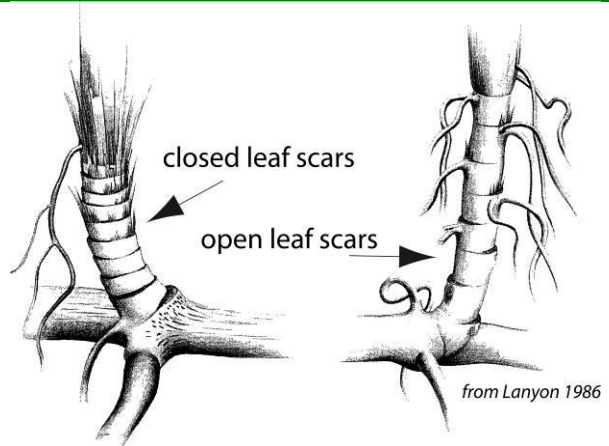


Leaf		
Tip	Can be rounded or pointed. Tips are easily damaged or cropped, so young leaves are best to observe.	 <p>rounded pointed</p>
Veins	Used by the plant to transport water, nutrients and photosynthetic products. The pattern, direction and placement of veins in the leaf blade are used for identification. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cross-vein: perpendicular to the length of the leaf</li> <li>• parallel-vein: along the length of the leaf</li> <li>• mid-vein: prominent central vein</li> <li>• intramarginal-vein: around inside edge of leaf</li> </ul>	 <p>cross parallel mid intramarginal</p>
Edges	The edges of the leaf can be either serrated, smooth or inrolled	 <p>serrated smooth inrolled</p>
Ligule	<b>Membranous structure found at the junction of the blade and sheath.</b> Clasps leaf sheaths, aiding protection of enclosed younger plant parts.	 <p>ligule</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.	 <p>clean &amp; flattened fibrous</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 ( <b>petiole</b> ) e.g. <i>Halophila ovalis</i> .	 <p>petiole rhizome scar stem</p>



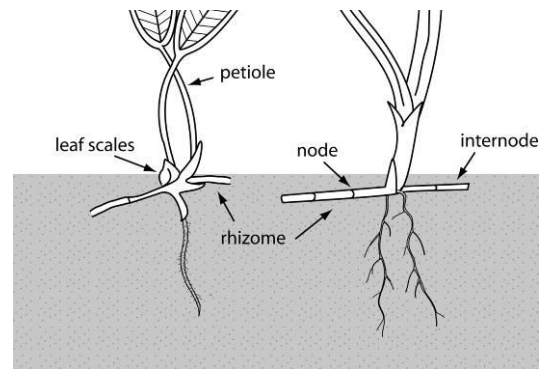
### Stem

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*).



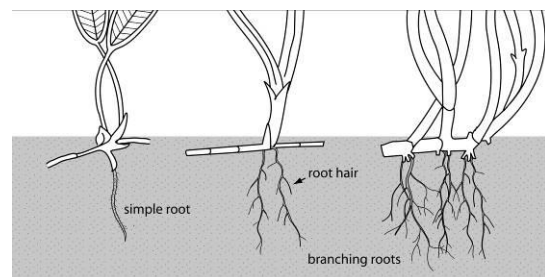
### Rhizome

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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# A guide to the identification of seagrasses in North East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

Adapted from <sup>[39]</sup>.

## Leaves cylindrical



cylindrical

### *Syringodium isoetifolium*

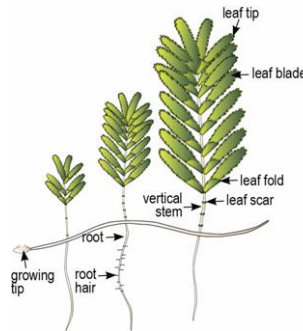
- leaves noodle/spaghetti like and taper to a point
- leaves contain air cavities
- leaves 7-30cm long

## Leaves oval to oblong



oval to oblong

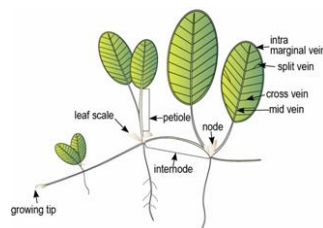
### obvious vertical stem with more than 2 leaves



### *Halophila spinulosa*

- leaves arranged opposite in pairs
- leaf margin serrated
- 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*

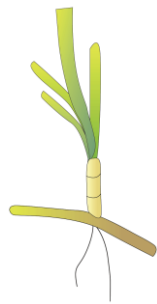
- less than 8 pairs of cross veins
- leaf 5-15mm long and 3.5-6mm wide
- leaf margins smooth
- no leaf hairs

### *Halophila ovalis*

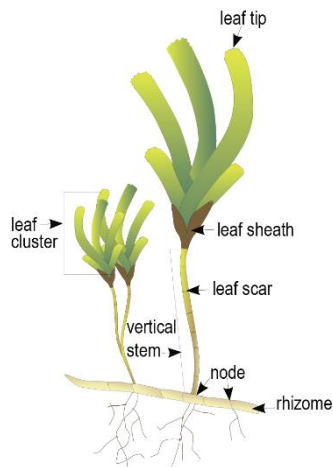
- cross veins 8 or more pairs
- leaf 5-40mm long and 5-20mm wide
- leaf margins smooth
- no leaf hairs

## Leaves strap-like

### Leaves can arise from vertical stem



straplike



#### *Cymodocea rotundata*

- leaf tip rounded with smooth edge
- leaf sheath not obviously flattened
- leaf sheath scars continuous around upright stem

#### *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

#### *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

#### *Oceana serrulata* (syn. *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

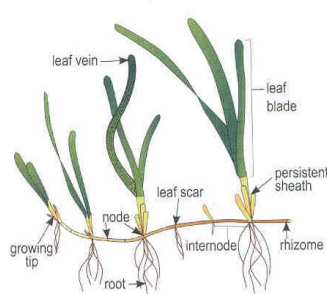
#### *Thalassia hemprichii*

- leaf tip rounded, may be slightly serrated
- leaf often distinctly curved, 10-40cm long
- short (1-2mm) black/red tannin cells in leaf blade
- thick rhizome with many dark nodes between shoots

#### *Thalassodendron ciliatum*

- distinct upright stem (up to 65cm) bearing leaf cluster
- ribbon-like (>5 mm wide), sickle-shaped leaves with ligule
- leaf tip rounded with serrations
- stem and rhizome woody
- often found attached to rock or coral substrate

### Leaves always arise directly from rhizome



#### *Enhalus acoroides*

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

# 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 Improvement Plans or Best Practice Guidelines; and Government Legislation.

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 condition

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 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 method for monitoring seagrass condition is used in the Seagrass-Watch program. This method uses globally standardised measurements taken from sites established within representative meadows. 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 **28 March 1998** in Australia, Seagrass-Watch has expanded internationally to more than 26 countries. Monitoring is currently occurring at over 425 sites. To learn more about the program, visit [www.seagrasswatch.org](http://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 scientists and volunteers from a wide variety of backgrounds who all share the common interest in marine conservation. Most participants are associated with universities & research institutions, government (local & state), non-government organisations or established local stakeholder groups.

Seagrass-Watch integrates with existing scientific programs to raise awareness and 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. This ensures data is of the highest quality and that time and resources are not wasted. The only condition is that on ground data collection must be overseen by a qualified scientist or trained and competent participant (18 years or over). After completion of a formal training course, participants can produce reliable data. Formal training is conducted by Seagrass-Watch HQ (or an approved service provider) 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. At least a professional scientist or a formally trained volunteer must be present at each monitoring event. Evidence of competency is securely filed at Seagrass-Watch HQ.

### **QUALITY ASSURANCE-QUALITY CONTROL**

Seagrass-Watch has an accepted Quality Assurance-Quality Control (**QAQC**) 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 ( $\pm 3\text{m}$ ) 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 Seagrass-Watch HQ scientists – preferably the next day and unknown to local observers). Any discrepancy in these duplicates is used to identify and subsequently mitigate bias. For the most part, 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 all 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 Seagrass-Watch File 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 datasheets,*
- *good quality quadrat photographs (high resolution),*
- *voucher specimens (if required), and*
- *completed data entry 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 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 scientist or formally 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 observers 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.

## **DATA PROPERTY AND OWNERSHIP**

All raw data collected throughout the Seagrass-Watch program is the property of the individual/group/institution (*Principal*) who collected it, and Seagrass-Watch Ltd is custodian. When a Principal (*data collector*) submits data to Seagrass-Watch HQ, they do so under the agreement that Seagrass-Watch HQ can conduct a data quality assessment as part of the Seagrass-Watch program's QAQC protocols and that the validated data is available for condition and trend reporting at local, regional, state, national and global scales. Copies of raw data are provided to third parties only when permission from the Principal is provided.

Ownership of data within the Seagrass-Watch program is determined by mutual agreement based on who is collecting the raw data, whether the data undergoes a quality assessment as part of Seagrass-Watch QAQC protocols and the funding sources that support the monitoring:

- **Raw Data** ownership (intellectual property rights) lies with the Principal (*data collector*). Seagrass-Watch Ltd is custodian of the **Raw Data**.
- **Validated Data** ownership (intellectual property rights) is shared between the Principal and Seagrass-Watch Ltd.

All data interpretation is conducted by Seagrass-Watch HQ. This ensures that the interpretation of data is consistent, unbiased and of scientific merit. Seagrass-Watch HQ also encourages peer review of published results.

Apart from the regional & state-wide report cards, the data has also been used for:

- understanding and responding to impacts from catchment runoff<sup>[40, 41]</sup>, coastal developments (e.g., marina constructions) and dredging proposals.
- Understanding natural levels of change<sup>[42-44]</sup> and supporting marine habitat conservation.

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.*

Notes:

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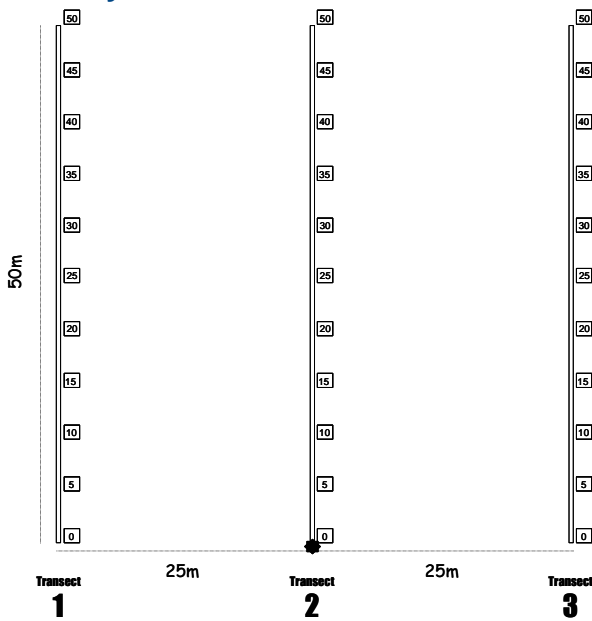
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# Permanent Transect Monitoring Protocols

Source: McKenzie et al. 2003<sup>(45)</sup> ([www.seagrasswatch.org/manuals/](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/manuals/))

## Site layout



**Quadrat code = site + transect+quadrat**

**e.g., C11225 = 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 participants involved in advance so they can make their arrangements to get to the site on time. List on this timetable what participants 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.
- 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 sheets
- Seagrass identification sheet

## Each sampling event

Within the site, lay out the three 50 metre transects parallel to each other, 25 m 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 taken of every quadrat along each transect. Use a quadrat free of strings and place the photo quadrat labeller beside the quadrat and the tape measure, with the correct site code displayed.
- Take the photograph from an angle as **vertical** as possible, which includes the entire quadrat frame, quadrat labeller 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).
- Note features such as ripples across the sediment surface (indicates the level of sediment movement from wave action)

### 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, dugong excavating, turtle cropping, bioturbation, sediment ripples) within the comments column.
- If water covers half or more of the quadrat, measure depth in cm.

#### **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 leave. 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%. Remember, the lower the cover, the more accurate the measures.
- If cover is below 3%, you can count the seagrass shoots and calculate percent cover using the rule of approx 1 shoot = 0.1%. Please note: this will be greater for shoots of larger sized species.

#### **Step 5. Estimate seagrass species composition**

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

#### **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 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. Monitoring seed banks (an indicator of meadow resilience)**

- Using the seed corer, sample sediment to a depth of 10cm every 10m along five transects, 12.5m apart.
- Release each core into a sieve, wash away the sediment and count the number of seeds retained.

### **At completion of monitoring**

#### **Step 1. Before leaving the site**

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

#### **Step 2. Wash & pack gear**

- Rinse all tapes, pegs and quadrats with freshwater and let them dry. Do every day of monitoring.
- Review supplies for next sampling and request new materials.
- Store gear in a safe and dry place for next sampling.

#### **Step 3. Press any voucher seagrass specimens if collected**

- The voucher specimen should be pressed as soon as possible after collection. Do not refrigerate >2 days.

#### **Step 3. Submit all data**

- Data can be entered into the MS-Excel file downloadable from [www.seagrasswatch.org](http://www.seagrasswatch.org).
- Upload full resolution quadrat photos, high resolution scans of datasheets and data files to a file hosting service or similar.
- If required, mail original datasheets and herbarium sheets

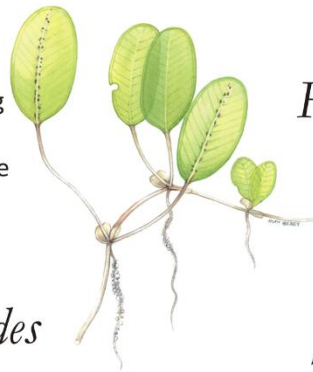
Seagrass-Watch HQ  
For postal or email address, see  
<https://www.seagrasswatch.org/contact/>

# SEAGRASS SPECIES CODES

## Ho

### *Halophila ovalis*

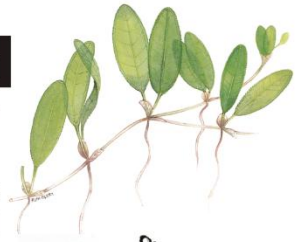
- leaf elliptical to oblong
- 8 or more cross veins
- no hairs on leaf surface
- leaf margins smooth



## Hd

### *Halophila decipiens*

- delicate ovate leaf
- fine leaf hairs on both sides
- leaf margins finely serrated
- 6-8 cross veins



## Ea

### *Enhalus acoroides*

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



## Th

### *Thalassia hemprichii*

- ribbon-like leaves, often curved
- leaves 10-40cm long
- leaf tip rounded, slightly serrated
- tannin cells (1-2mm) in leaf blade
- thick rhizome with many dark nodes between shoots



## Hu

### *Halodule uninervis*

- trident leaf tip
- 1 clear central vein
- usually pale rhizome, with black fibrous nodes



## Hs

### *Halophila spinulosa*

- fern like
- leaves arranged in opposite pairs
- leaf margin serrated
- erect shoot to 15-20cm height
- found at subtidal depths



## Cr

### *Cymodocea rotundata*

- rounded leaf tip
- narrow leaf blade (2-4mm wide)
- leaves 7-15cm long
- 9-15 longitudinal veins
- well developed leaf sheath



## Cs

### *Oceana serrulata*

formerly *Cymodocea serrulata*

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



## Si

### *Syringodium isoetifolium*

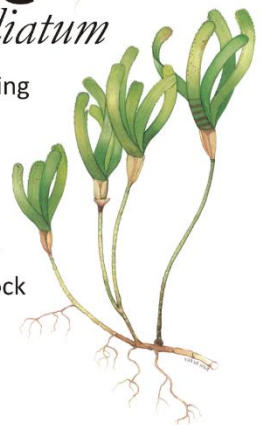
- narrow spaghetti-like leaves
- cylindrical in cross section, 1-2mm diameter
- leaves contain air cavities
- leaf tip tapers to a point
- leaves 7-30cm long



## Tc

### *Thalassodendron ciliatum*

- erect stem (to 65cm) bearing leaf cluster
- ribbon-like, sickle-shaped leaves with ligule
- round, serrated leaf tip
- rhizome tough and woody
- often found attached to rock or coral substrate



Illustrations not to scale  
copyright Seagrass-Watch HQ

# SEAGRASS-WATCH MONITORING



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

START of transect (GPS reading)

Latitude: ..... Longitude: .....

OBSERVER: Beverly Citizen DATE: 17/2/21  
 LOCATION: Burren Heads  
 SITE code: BHT1 TRANSECT no.: 2  
 START TIME: 1304 END TIME: 1340

Quadrat (metres from transect origin)	Sediment (eg. mud/sand/shell)	Comments (eg 1lx 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	SCx3 DFTx1 HCx1	40	30	70	0	5417	5	33
2 (5m)	Fs/S	GASx2 Ray pt x2	33	50	50	0	61616	10	18
3 (10m)	CS	Hcx3	0			0	-	0	-
4 (15m)	m/s	CHx10	0			1cm	-	17	-
5 (20m)	m/s	Turtle cropping GASx3	18	5	90	5	71516	12	57
6 (25m)	m/s/sh	SCx3 mwx2	36	90	90	10	81616	2	95
7 (30m)	Fine Sand	CHx9 GWSx1	48	100			-	0	10
8 (35m)	CS/S	Nothing	0.7	100			61515	0	36
9 (40m)	FS	HCx2	23	96	4		551516	5	38
10 (45m)	S/m	GWSx2	41	3	97		81817	3	90
11 (50m)	mud	CHx2 SCx1	16	3	7	90	71718	38	95

END of transect (GPS reading) Latitude: ..... Longitude: .....  
 FS = Fine Sand Sh = shell  
 CS = Coarse Sand  
 m = mud  
 S = Sand  
 SC = Sea Cucumber DFT = Dugong feeding trail  
 HC = Hermit Crab  
 GAS = Gastropod  
 CH = Crab Hole  
 mw = mud worm  
 CW = Green worm

# 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. An herbarium specimen is simple in form and low-tech in preparation, yet it preserves a wealth of valuable information. If properly stored, an 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. For example, in [Northern Territory, all marine plants, including seagrass, are protected under the Fisheries Act 1988](#) (Section 17 Special permits).

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.

### 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 nearby (usually located at a University or Government agency), you can submit specimens to Seagrass-Watch HQ which maintains a Herbaria in collaboration with 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](mailto:hq@seagrasswatch.org) and will be lodged in the Seagrass-Watch Virtual Herbarium <https://www.seagrasswatch.org/herbarium/>.

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.

## Notes:

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# 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 <sup>[46]</sup>.**

<b>Mud</b>	Fine-medium Clay	0 – 0.002 mm
	Coarse Clay	0.0021 – 0.004 mm
	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
<b>Sand</b>	Very Fine Sand	0.0631 – 0.125 mm
	Fine Sand	0.1251 – 0.250 mm
	Medium Sand	0.2501 – 0.500 mm
	Coarse Sand	0.5001 – 1.000 mm
	Very Coarse Sand	1.0001 – 2.000 mm
<b>Gravel</b>	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).

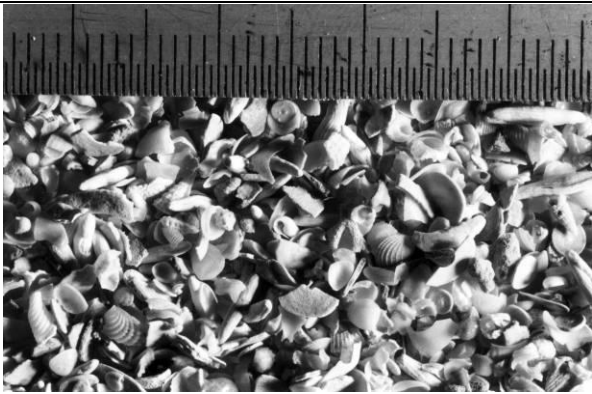
<b>mud</b>	<i>has a smooth and sticky texture.</i>
<b>fine sand</b>	<i>fairly smooth texture with some roughness just detectable. Not sticky in nature.</i>
<b>sand</b>	<i>rough grainy texture, particles clearly distinguishable.</i>
<b>coarse sand</b>	<i>coarse texture, particles loose.</i>
<b>gravel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

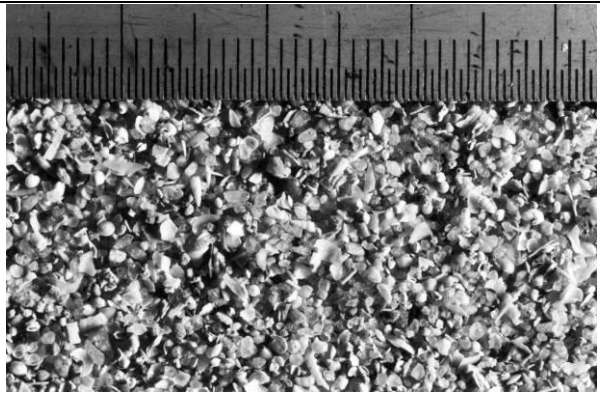
The visual/tactile estimation method used in Seagrass-Watch is a simple yet relatively accurate measure of the sediment grain size which can be used for quantitative assessments <sup>[47]</sup>,

<https://bit.ly/3pTowW>.

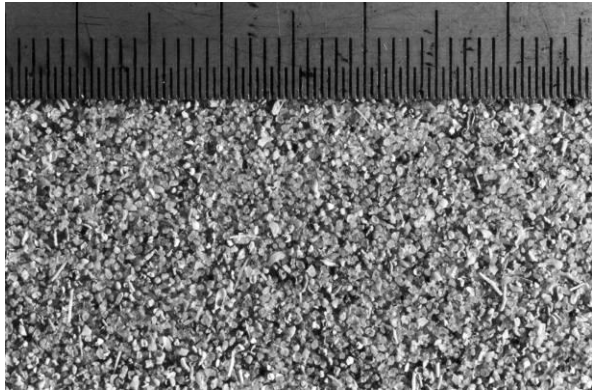




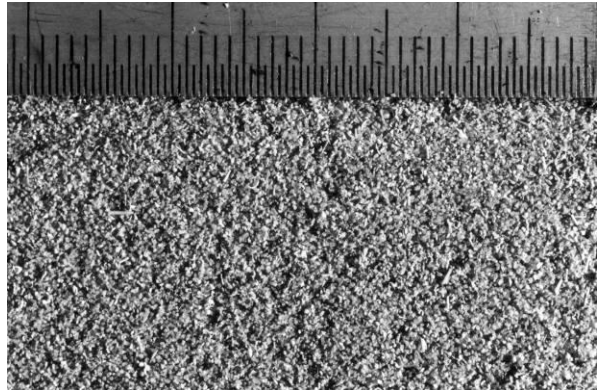
gravel (>2mm)



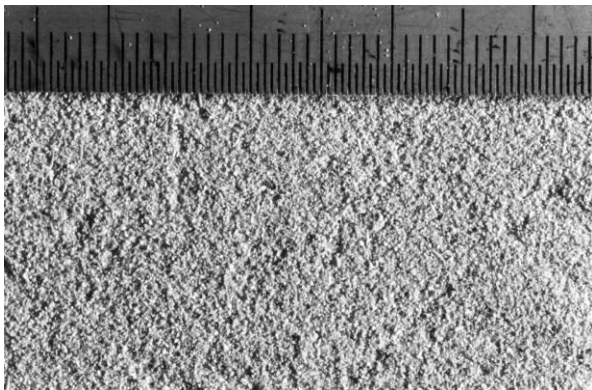
very coarse sand (1 – 2 mm)



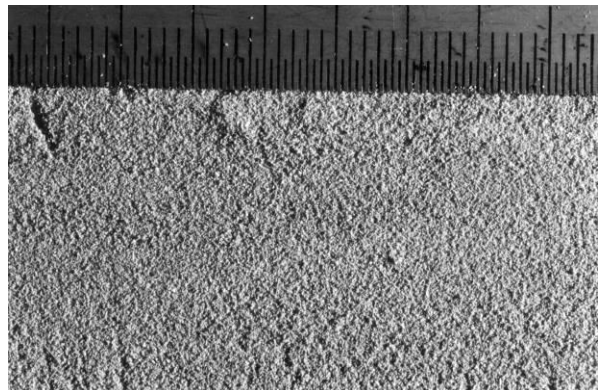
coarse sand (0.5 – 1 mm)



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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# Seagrass conservation

## 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 reclamation 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. Global climate change is further undermining the resilience of seagrass ecosystems. 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](http://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 <sup>[48]</sup>. 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 <sup>[48]</sup>. Reactive processes can include oil spill response plans, environmental impact assessments and seagrass restoration interventions.

### *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 <sup>[48]</sup>.

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 <sup>[48]</sup>. 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.

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 Western view of the sea as common domain, open to all and managed by governments <sup>[49]</sup>. Unlike contemporary Western 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 thousands 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 <sup>[50]</sup>.

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



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## Useful web links

**Seagrass-Watch** Official Site <https://www.seagrasswatch.org>

**SeagrassSpotter** A conservation and education tool that could lead to new discoveries about one of the ocean's most under-appreciated habitats – seagrass. With SeagrassSpotter, ocean enthusiasts around the world can become citizen scientists who contribute to marine conservation with just a few taps of their phone. <https://seagrassspotter.org/>

**Project Seagrass** A marine conservation charity dedicated to ensuring that seagrass meadows are protected globally, for the biodiversity and people that depend on them. <https://www.projectseagrass.org/>

**Dugong & Seagrass Research Toolkit** Helps you refine your research questions and provide you with a list of recommended techniques and tools to answer them. Designed for use by marine natural resource managers and decision-makers and for dugong and seagrass researchers, the Toolkit will show you which techniques are the most effective and efficient for your team capacity, budget and timeline. <http://www.conservation.tools/>

**World Seagrass Association** A global network of scientists and coastal managers committed to research, protection and management of the world's seagrasses. <https://worldseagrass.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. [lists.murdoch.edu.au/mailman/listinfo/seagrass\\_forum](https://lists.murdoch.edu.au/mailman/listinfo/seagrass_forum)

**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. <https://ian.umces.edu/>

## Notes:

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