

## Media Release **No. 390**

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### **NEW RESEARCH TRACKS DUGONG MOVEMENTS WITHIN THE TORRES STRAIT**

The Torres Strait supports the largest population of dugongs in the world, however not a lot is known about their movements within region. James Cook University (JCU), the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) and the Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC) together with the Torres Strait Rangers are working to collect this valuable information.

In September 2010 JCU researchers and Mabuiag Rangers tagged three female and three male dugongs in the Yarral Gumi Maza region (between Mabuiag and Turnigan Island). The movements of these six adult dugongs have since been tracked via satellite, providing useful information to the research team.

Data has shown that although tagged and released in the same area, the movement of each dugong differs. One dugong moved north towards Papua New Guinea and another north west towards the Gulf of Carpentaria. Two dugongs moved towards the southern boundary of the Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority region and the other two stayed within the Yarral Gumi Maza region (see Figure 1).

Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Chairperson Mr John T. Kris said data collection and monitoring is crucial for dugong conservation.

“The research and monitoring being conducted ensures the continued protection, preservation and enjoyment of our natural and cultural environment,” Mr Kris said.

“The involvement of Indigenous rangers in land and sea programs ensures a community based approach to the sustainable management of fisheries in the Torres Strait.”

Dr. Mariana Fuentes from JCU acknowledged the importance of the Indigenous rangers and traditional owners’ involvement in this project.

“The support provided by the rangers and local community from Mabuiag Island and TSRA Land and Sea Management Unit was essential,” Dr Fuentes said.

“Mabuiag rangers Terrence Whap, Charlie Hankin and David Amber were actively involved throughout the project. They were able to provide valuable cultural and expert advice on catching the animals and timing the field work.”

The results of the project were shared with the Mabuiag community during a BBQ and video night, where senior ranger Terrence Whap and researcher Mariana Fuentes spoke about the importance of the project and screened a video highlighting the key findings.

“By tagging the dugongs we have a better idea of their movement and how far they go. This information will help us manage our dugongs,” Mr Whap said.

Another expedition will take place later this year to tag four more dugongs.

Rangers are currently searching for two missing tags which have come free from the dugongs (See Figure 2). Retrieved tags will provide valuable information to the continuation of the project.

For more information on the project or if you find a dugong tag please contact Mariana Fuentes by telephone (07) 4781 5270.

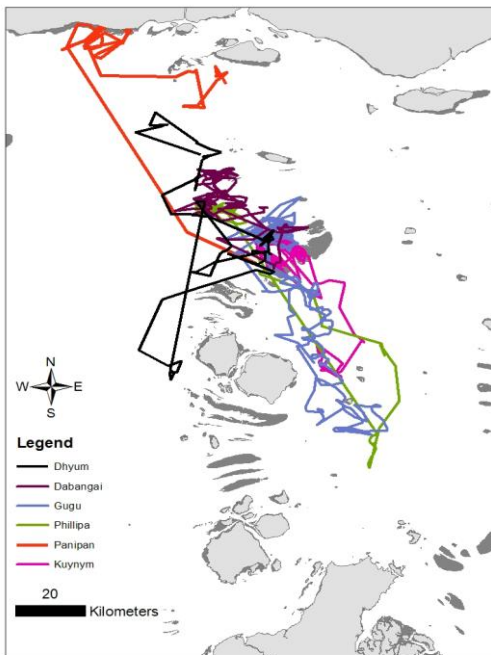


Figure 1. Movement of dugongs tagged.



Figure 2. Example of a tag used to track dugongs.

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