

Media Release:

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Seagrass-Watch Training Starts Today

Scientists from the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) launched a new training program in Nhulunbuy today to enable Indigenous Sea Ranger groups to monitor the health of seagrass meadows across the Northern Territory.

NRETAS Principal Marine Scientist, Professor Karen Edyvane said this is the first time that Seagrass-Watch training has been undertaken in the Northern Territory, and is a very important step forward in providing effective monitoring tools for Indigenous Rangers to use in managing their sea country.

“This is the first of several proposed marine environmental monitoring and training programs with Indigenous Sea Ranger groups being undertaken by NRETAS marine scientists,” Professor Edyvane said.

“Seagrass beds are a vital nursery area for many fish and crustaceans and also a key food source for marine wildlife, such as dugongs.

“The purpose of Seagrass-Watch is to collect data about the status and health of inshore seagrasses and provide early warning of major changes in seagrass abundance, distribution and species composition.”

The Seagrass-Watch training program is being held over the next three days in conjunction with the Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation and will involve four Indigenous Sea Ranger groups from across eastern Arnhem Land.

“The rangers will learn how to identify the many different species of seagrasses, and the field techniques for surveying and monitoring seagrasses,” Professor Edyvane said.

Seagrass-Watch coordinator and training provider, Dr Len McKenzie said Seagrass-Watch developed out of recognition that a new approach was needed to monitor the status and health of seagrass meadows.

“Coastal communities are concerned about the health and loss of seagrasses in their regions and are keen to play a primary information gathering role by working in partnership with government agencies,” Dr McKenzie said.

“Industry and community groups are also aware of the vital links between seagrasses and important fish, turtle and dugong populations.

“Seagrass-Watch has captured this interest and facilitates links between community networks, government agencies and local industry groups to provide scientific advice on critical seagrass resources.”

Seagrass-Watch is a community-based monitoring program developed by Queensland's Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries and is being introduced into the Northern Territory by NRETAS.

For more information on the Seagrass-Watch program go to www.seagrasswatch.org.

Ends

Media Note – for more information contact Karen Edyvane on 8920 9261 or 0401 115 786

Images courtesy of Neil Smit

- 1. Enhalus mixed sp Gouldburn Island**
- 2. Halophila mixed meadow NW Field Island**
- 3. Dugong tracks - seagrass at Casuarina Coastal Reserve**

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