

Media Release:

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Aerial Survey Counts Dugongs in Darwin Harbour

The Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport (NRETAS) has completed a successful trial aerial survey of the dugong population in Darwin Harbour.

NRETAS Marine Biodiversity Director Tony Griffiths said approximately 20 dugongs were recorded during Monday's two-hour helicopter survey along the coast, which targeted known seagrass meadows in the harbour at Casuarina Beach, Lee Point, Fannie Bay and Talc Head.

"We are pleased with these numbers, as dugongs tend to be quite shy and the waters in Darwin Harbour are often murky, which makes surveying difficult," said Mr Griffiths.

"The survey is an important step in our ongoing efforts to get a better understanding of the local dugong population.

"While we know dugongs are iconic and important, we don't have clear numbers on how many there are in Darwin Harbour, where they congregate and just how important the harbour is to them.

"Surveys like these will help us to establish baseline information on population size, increase our ability to detect changes in the population and get a sense of what might be causing any changes."

Further aerial surveys are planned for early 2012 to assess dugong populations in Bynoe Harbour and along the coastline to the Western Australia border.

The dugong surveys are part of a wider Darwin Harbour monitoring and research project that received \$800,000 in funding from the Territory Government in 2010.

These harbour research activities have so far included the assessment of the extent and condition of seagrass, the investigation and monitoring of fish biodiversity, and surveys of dolphin populations.

Ends

Media Note – for more information, contact Tony Griffiths on 8995 5004.

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