

# DUGONG CRISIS

*The gentle sea cow is in real trouble.*

*Dugongs along Queensland's urban coast which stretches from Cooktown down to the border are perilously close to extinction. And their plight is ignored by both the Queensland and Federal governments.*



# DUGONG DHARMA

*Once upon a time, dugongs were plentiful off the east coast of Australia before humanity's greed overwhelmed the environment, destroying the precious natural heritage of our world.*

*"One of the fishermen of Wide Bay told the writer.. he had seen a mob of dugong which appeared to fill the water with their bodies.*

*He computed this school to be half a mile wide and from three to four miles long. The writer's boat once anchored in Hervey Bay, in one of those channels through which the tide passes when running off the flats.*

*For between three and four hours there was a continuous stream of dugong passing while the tide went out, which those in the boat could only liken to a rush of cattle out of a*



*stockyard after a general muster.. some thousands must have gone out with the tide."*

# DUGONG MORTALITY

*After Cyclone Yasi, fishermen reported emaciated, sick, lethargic dugongs and turtles with insufficient energy to escape from any accidental netting.*

Yet no moratorium on the hunting of dugong was declared by the Queensland or Federal Governments.

Prior to the cyclones, dugong expert Professor Helene Marsh assessed dugongs in this region as 'Critically Endangered' a universal category which means the species is **"facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future."**

According to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Report 2009:

*'The recovery of dugongs along the urban coast will be influenced by the state of seagrass habitats, their principal food source. Inshore seagrass beds are particularly vulnerable to disturbance and loss due to coastal activities such as reclamation, dredging and other foreshore development, increased sedimentation and degraded water quality.*

*The Report assesses recovery of the urban coast dugong population as poor and very prolonged: 'may take more than a century to recover and is*



**subject to many continuing pressures.'**

Scientists recommended urgent surveys be undertaken to establish the location of any viable seagrass beds, ensuring these areas are given immediate protection until such time as the ongoing crises are resolved.

**PLEASE VISIT OUR SISTER SITE**



**NO ACTION WAS TAKEN BY THE QUEENSLAND OR FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS.**

# GLADSTONE

*The deliberate extermination of the dugong and turtles which habituated the Gladstone area is a national tragedy.*

These are species listed under the Federal Environment Protection Biodiversity & Conservation Act.

That listing means the Federal government has a legal obligation to protect these animals. The massive dredging operation of some 42 million cubic metres of seabed for the development of the world's largest LNG Terminal will now be finished in October this year, 15 months ahead of time.

This massive speed up of the operation has been the result

of dredging 24 hours a day, with no break during the major flooding in January. Those dredges just kept operating making the seawater more and more turbid, driving any living creature out of the Harbour.

Prior to the massive dredging a study commissioned by the Gladstone Ports Corporation found that a take, or a quota, of more than zero dugongs would be unsustainable. In 2011, twelve dugong deaths were recorded. In 2012, ten deaths. The Western Port Dredging



Project is located at the northern limit of Rodds Bay Dugong Sanctuary ( a Zone B restricted use) Dugong Protected Area.

A Dugong Protected Area under Queensland legislation is a place which supports significant dugong populations

and/or important seagrass habitat. They have a specific objective of protecting dugongs by limiting exposure to threatening processes.

*The legislation has been ignored by Federal and State governments.*

## INDIGENOUS SLAUGHTER OF ENDANGERED SPECIES HAS TO END

*Under the Native Title Act 1993, native title holders can legally hunt dugongs and green turtles for personal, domestic or non-commercial communal needs. It's an open ended situation with no adequate definition of "needs".*

Australians for Animals firmly believes Native Title cannot be allowed to trump the protection of our wildlife. The laws which protect our unique and rapidly disappearing wildlife must cover every Australian, indigenous and white alike.

Endangered means endangered. There must be no slaughter. In Australia, the killing of endangered dugongs, turtles and other species under the protection of native title is unmonitored, unregulated and carried out with many instances of extreme cruelty.

RSPCA Queensland wanted state laws amended to remove the exemption for traditional hunting to ensure the humane killing of animals. Subsequently, the Queensland government has amended the state laws but no charges have been laid against any indigenous people who continue to



perpetrate abysmal cruelty on dugongs and turtles.

RSPCA Queensland has documented some of the cruelty. When hunted, green sea turtles often had their flippers cut off while they were still alive and were then left on beaches in the sun. He said live dugongs were often tied to wharves and had parts of their

flesh cut off intermittently to keep the meat fresh.

A 2003 report by the Federal Government entitled – National Recreational and Indigenous Fishing Survey is the most current information available on the extent of indigenous slaughter of animals listed under the Federal Environment Protection & Biodiversity Act.

Indigenous fishers harvested a range of species that are prohibited for non-indigenous Australians. These species included reptiles (crocodiles, turtles) and mammals (dugong). It was estimated that indigenous fishers harvested about 390 crocodile, 1,600 dugong, 6,000 saltwater turtle, 14,000 freshwater turtle and 40,000 turtle eggs during the survey year. Dugong were taken in all States/ Territory with largest numbers (1,300 dugong) being reported from

Queensland.

In 2009, according to the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report, 1,293 dugong were "harvested" in Queensland. This figure is based on the 2003 report. There is no current information as the indigenous slaughter is neither monitored nor regulated.

This horrendous slaughter of dugongs in Queensland is unsustainable. Yet these figures failed to persuade the Federal government to take any action to arrest the slaughter of these defenceless animals in spite of massive damage by Cyclone Yasi followed by major flooding events wiping out seagrass beds.

In the 21st century, not only must the Native Title right to slaughter endangered species be prohibited but traditional methods of killing are no longer acceptable or appropriate. The cruelty being perpetrated on dugongs and turtles must end.

# DUGONGS PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN MARINE ENVIRONMENT

*Dugongs are gentle creatures dedicated to their young. They remain together during the long period of calf dependency, their young rarely straying more than 1-3 body lengths from their mothers. They communicate with vocalisations. When travelling, calves often swim above their mothers reducing their visibility to predators.*

Dugongs spend a large part of their day feeding on seagrass. When shipping traffic and other human-related activities disturb their feeding, dugongs may find it difficult to feed long enough to satisfy their nutritional needs. The problem is much worse when their food supply is limited as it is now as a result of Cyclone Yasi and major floods, dredging, massive port development and huge increases in shipping traffic.

Their habitat and prey, seagrass, is critically important as fish nurseries and as a carbon sink. The inter-connectedness between dugongs and seagrass is a wonderful example of nature's bio-feedback mechanisms. Dugong faeces provide a nutrient source to the seagrass they feed on, maintaining local patches and ensuring vibrant seagrass beds



which in turn provide a nursery for fish stock.

Without dugongs and turtles munching on seagrass beds, depositing their faeces to provide the necessary nutrients, coastal fish nurseries are significantly impacted.

We know from concerned indigenous leaders there's a roaring trade in illegal dugong meat coming from the Torres Strait to Queensland where many Islanders now live.

There has never been a more desperate need for a total ban

on the killing of dugongs in Australian waters.

Dugongs should not be slaughtered to celebrate culture. Dugongs have a right to exist and future generations have a right to expect the protection of endangered animals.

**There are 22,000 vessel movements a month in Gladstone Harbour. Ship strikes of dugongs and turtles need NOT be reported.**

**No audit of environmental conditions has been undertaken by the Queensland or Federal Governments.**

**ALL THAT WILL BE LEFT ARE THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE.**

These are the prophetic words of Aunty Mary, an elder with the Mandubarra people of Innisfail. Aunty Mary, who along with other Aboriginal elders, is deeply concerned by the ongoing slaughter of dugongs and turtles by many indigenous people.

## POLITICAL NO MAN'S LAND

*With the change of leadership in the ALP, Environment Minister Tony Burke has been replaced by Mark Butler. Mr Butler has no experience in environmental issues.*

AFA is keen to get the results of the Independent Review Panel which Burke convened to address the concerns over Gladstone LNG development expressed by the UNESCO World Heritage team. The report should have been finalised and made public on June 30. To date there's no sign of the report.

Phone calls to Mark Butler's office have proved fruitless. In spite of promises to phone back with details of the relevant

contact in the new Minister's office, no calls are received. No one seems to know what's going on and AFA suspects that the report was not kind to the Gillard government and has been buried.

With an election due to be announced any day, a report which condemns the absolute failure of the Federal government to protect Gladstone and the Reef will not go down well.



AUSTRALIANS FOR  
**animals**

PROTECT NURTURE RESTORE

Reg. Charity No. CFN12644

PO Box 414, Brunswick Heads 2483 Australia  
Tel: 61 2 6680 3674  
Fax: 61 2 6680 3612  
suearnold@linknet.com.au



[facebook.com/australiansforanimals](https://www.facebook.com/australiansforanimals)

# ACTION

***AFA has been on the job in our efforts to bring urgent political attention and protection to the dugong population.***

Early in July, our Co-ordinator gave a presentation at the annual conference of the Australian Marine Science Association – a five day scientific effort on the Gold Coast. She was the only non scientist to make a presentation which was hard hitting, making no bones about the failure by the Queensland and Federal governments to lift a finger to protect the dugong.

If any of you would like her powerpoint presentation, please contact the AFA office.

By the time this newsletter is out, the Galaxy Poll has been commissioned by AFA to ask two questions which will determine whether Australians support the killing of threatened and endangered species by indigenous people. The second question will ask whether Australians support a change in the Native Title Act that would prohibit the killing of these protected animals.

Don't hold your breath waiting for a big media splash on the results. The mainstream media does not want to know about the tragic loss of dugongs or the plight of turtles and in shore dolphins who are the innocent victims of the

resource industry's development of the Reef.

Australians, in general, are fed up with our political parties, our political leaders, the scientific community and the media. The apathy with which the ongoing destruction of Australia's environmental heritage is greeted by those in power is tragic, stupid, arrogant and irresponsible.

AFA has called journalists in major newspapers, radio and TV to report on the environmental disasters which are the reality of the destruction of the Great Barrier Reef. There has been a dead silence in response.



## DON'T GIVE UP HOPE

***The journey of protection for Australia's precious wildlife heritage, both marine and terrestrial is a never ending saga.***

At election time, the community has the opportunity to get some reality out of candidates and to bring important issues out of the closet.

Please make sure your vote counts. Get some answers from the candidates in your electorate. Write to your local paper. Do whatever you can to bring some focus to these desperate times.

AFA will never give up in this quest. The animals have no voice and rely on the compassion of humanity. A quote from *Natural News* says it all.

*"The game" isn't about who dies with the most money,*

*power or real estate. You win the game by honoring the principles that have been laid out for humans through every world religion in human history: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Respect life. Defend life. Live with humility, avoid conflict when you can, yet unleash your inner warrior when necessary to defend the innocent.*

*These are universal principles of spiritual adulthood."*

***For the Animals, Sue Arnold & Friends.***

## GIVE GENEROUSLY

You can donate to Australians for Animals through GiveNow's secure online server or please send your donations to:

**AUSTRALIANS FOR ANIMALS  
PO BOX 414  
BRUNSWICK HEADS 2483**



Reg. Charity No.  
CFN12644

[www.givenow.com.au/australiansforanimals](http://www.givenow.com.au/australiansforanimals)