

## CMS Office – Abu Dhabi: A Decade of Achievements

*Celebrating a 10-year Partnership with Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi and the UAE*

### Dugong and Seagrass Research Toolkit Helps Conservationists in Diverse Range States

Researchers and marine conservation managers in over 100 countries have now accessed the Dugong and Seagrass Research Toolkit, an interactive online tool, developed by a diverse team of top international conservation experts.

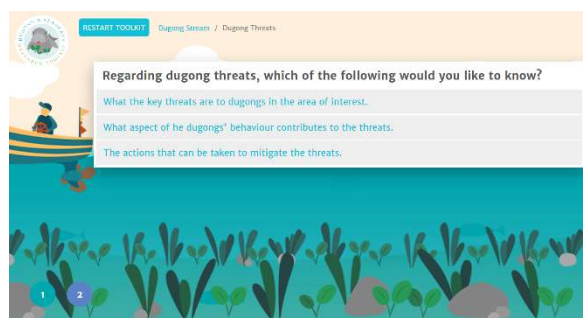
Launched in March 2017, the Toolkit supports researchers in the process of setting and refining their objectives, while considering overall conservation management goals, budgetary restraints, and specific challenges on the ground.

The Dugong and Seagrass Research Toolkit is a collaboration between the CMS Dugong MOU, Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD), as well as Total and Total Abu Al Bukhoosh. It was developed by a team of ten leading dugong, seagrass, and fisheries experts.



*Dugong and Seagrass Research Toolkit homepage*

“Many dugong Range States have least-developed status and face capacity issues and budget shortages — both major challenges to research and conservation” said Helene Marsh, Emeritus Professor of Environmental Science at James Cook University in Australia and co-chair of the IUCN Sirenia Specialist Group, who helped outline the concept of the Toolkit and later contributed to the development of its content.



*Dugong and Seagrass Research Toolkit decision-tree*

“The Toolkit is our answer to these challenges, which are present not only on the local, but also on the regional and global level. It also serves an efficient and cost-effective method of ensuring consistent, comparable and standardised data sets across the dugong range,” she said.

Toolkit users are guided to think through a decision-tree process to narrow down their research question and identify the most appropriate methods which will yield the required answers. As

a next step, the Toolkit presents researchers with a list of suitable techniques and tools. Guidance on how to select the most appropriate technique or tool is also provided.

The interactive approach of the tool makes it extremely efficient in providing the right kind of guidance, saving researchers and marine management agencies time, resources, and money, said Dr. Nicolas Pilcher, founder of the Marine Research Foundation in Malaysia, who also collaborated on the project.

“What we have tried to do is break down into relatively simple steps the process of defining a research question, refining it, putting it into context and then identifying the best methods available,” said Dr. Nicolas Pilcher.



*Dugong mother and calf by Sam Lawrence/Ocean Collective Media*

Classified as vulnerable in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, dugongs live in the coastal waters of a wide range of tropical and subtropical countries. Their diet is comprised of seagrass, therefore the existence of healthy seagrass beds is a precondition for the wellbeing of dugong populations.

The destruction of seagrass beds, along with entanglement in fishing gear, marine vessel strikes, poaching, pollution, and uncontrolled tourism are some of the human-made factors driving down dugong populations.

“Understanding how human activities and actions impact dugongs and seagrass beds within a particular area is, therefore, essential for any meaningful conservation effort,” said Dr. Donna Kwan, Programme Management Officer at the CMS Dugong MOU.

“Users can rely on the Toolkit to help them better understand the human factors that influence dugong and seagrass conservation and once the threats are clearly identified, a host of possible management solutions can be considered,” she said.

“We are extremely pleased with the response that the Toolkit has enjoyed since its launch,” said Dr. Kwan. “Perhaps our experience can inspire its adaptation which could help researchers studying other marine species such as manatees or marine turtles, and possibly even — habitats like mangroves or coral reefs.”



*Mixed seagrass meadow by AE/EGrandcourt*

The Dugong and Seagrass Research Toolkit is a valuable conservation tool and one of a number of important conservation initiatives that have resulted from the productive and successful collaboration between CMS Office – Abu Dhabi and Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi since 2009 when the office in the United Arab Emirates was first established. The vision and strong long-term support of Abu Dhabi’s government, combined with the rich scope of a United Nations forum, is supporting the conservation of dugongs, raptors and other migratory species, and promoting the well-being of associated human communities, to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.