



## Diving into vital dugong research

by Jake Dew

THE dugong population in Moreton Bay could rise if ground-breaking research into the shy sea cows' health and reproduction is successful.

The mammals have come under close observation with biologists from Sea World and the Sydney Aquarium teaming with the University of Queensland to study their behavioural patterns this week.

The research involved sampling dugongs of both sexes

from adults to juveniles.

Sea World director of marine sciences Trevor Long said a series of tissue samples measuring reproductive hormones, along with an ultrasound to determine their reproductive state, was taken.

"At the moment we know very little," said Mr Long. "Dugongs are difficult to research and what we know is from dead animals.

"But now, for the first time, we are able to assess and understand what constitutes a healthy animal."

It is believed 700 to 900 dugongs live in Moreton Bay.

Mr Long said anecdotal evidence from the 1930s indicated the population might have been much higher.

The dugongs were lifted on a specially designed stretcher to the deck of the *Sea World One* research vessel.

Mr Long said 13 had been caught this week, with testing to end tomorrow. "This is really vital work if we are going to protect this animal," he said.



Sea World and the University of Queensland have combined for research into dugongs