



Sea World visits Bay to research dugongs

University of Queensland biologists teamed up with Sea World researchers this week to study the vulnerable dugongs of Hervey Bay and the Great Sandy Straits.

The project was part of a larger program studying dugongs along the urban Queensland coast to monitor population size, composition and relatedness of the dugong groups.

Sea World Director of Marine Sciences, Trevor Long, said the dugong was a major conservation priority for Sea World.

"Sea World Research and Rescue's work over the years has lead to the rescue and rehabilitation of dugongs Pig and Wuru, the development of an educational dugong exhibit at Sea World and an ongoing focus and partnership with dugong experts such as Dr Lanyon and the University of Queensland", Mr Long said.

He said the goal of the Hervey Bay program was to establish if the three populations residing in the Hervey Bay, Moreton Bay and Shoalwater Bay areas were related.

Leader of the UQ Dugong Research Team, Dr Janet Lanyon, said if the groups were found to be related, they would need to be managed as a single



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unit, protecting coastal habitat and migration corridors between these regions.

"However if the groups are found to be truly separate populations, we will need to monitor population sizes of each group and levels of inbreeding, and mitigate threats to them."

Mr Long said that over the week, field biologists collected small skin samples from wild dugongs throughout the Hervey Bay and Great Sandy Strait area.

"These skin samples allow us to establish DNA tags for the animals. This tag tells us the identity of the dugong, the sex of the animal and soon, the age."

Mr Long said the water clarity of Hervey Bay and the Straits made it much harder to study dugongs than in Moreton Bay so a unique sampling method was developed by the UQ biologists.

Dugongs are approached by the boat and researcher's lean out with a pole which has a small biopsy punch attached to it and take the biopsy from the dugongs back.

Sea World has provided generous on-going support to the UQ dugong research team over recent years and in Hervey Bay will provide Sea World One as the main research vessel and base.