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Media Release

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First quarterly assessment of seagrass beds in Port Curtis and Rodds Bay completed

The findings of the first of the 2011 quarterly assessments of permanent seagrass beds, in and around the Gladstone harbour, have been completed by the Gladstone Ports Corporation.

CEO Leo Zussino said the results have shown seagrass cover was the lowest recorded in the program to date.

“This can be attributed to the impacts from the high rainfall, rivers in flood and low light conditions that have occurred over this period – in short the La Nina weather pattern,” Mr Zussino explained.

“There have been similar declines in seagrass beds at other east coast locations where seagrass is being monitored.”

Mr Zussino said the findings of the report showed there were seagrass present at all of the permanent seagrass sites with the exception of Wiggins Island where no above ground material was recorded.

“Despite these declines at permanent monitoring sites, large areas of seagrass still remain in Port Curtis and Rodds Bay including the large Pelican Banks *Zostera capricorni* meadow.

“The report shows substantial meadows still exist at Pelican Banks and a small increase in cover was observed in this survey period.

“These are spatially expansive meadows that are likely to have high fisheries productivity.

“This is important given the surveys at Pelican Banks and Facing Island in November 2010 recorded several dugong sightings and the presence of dugong feeding trails.

“Previous long term monitoring surveys within this area have also found evidence of dugong feeding activity.”

Mr Zussino added the seagrass beds have been particularly affected by two big wet seasons in a row.

“The findings for this quarter show the state of the seagrass at the bottom end of its natural yearly cycle and are not dredge related.

“There is some recovery already happening but coming into winter this is the time seagrass beds ‘go to sleep’ so there is not going to be any significant recovery until about August.”

Seagrass is being monitored at seven locations within the Gladstone harbour area including Pelican Banks North, Pelican Banks South, Facing Island, Fisherman’s Landing, Wiggins Island (west), Rodds Bay and Redcliffe.

The programme includes the monitoring of intertidal seagrass, biomass interpretation, temperature loggers and light loggers, seagrass tissue nutrients and statistical analysis, as well as an additional survey in March due to the decline in seagrass from February this year.

The programme commenced in 2002 and follows the methodology developed within the Reefs Water Quality MMP.

The frequency of monitoring has been increased in the last two years in preparation for the Western Basin Dredging and Disposal Project.

ENDS

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