Marine and Coastal

National Environmental Science Program

# PROJECT 3.5

## Partnerships for seagrass research and protection

### The challenge

Northern Australian seagrass meadows support dugongs, green turtles, fish, prawns and other important species. Understanding their distribution and health now, and over time, is essential so regional planners have information to make the right decisions about community activities and economic development.

Unfortunately, for large areas of the coast, data on these important habitats is lacking. Few large-scale surveys have been done, and only a handful of ongoing seagrass monitoring programs exist.

Presently, regional planning often proceeds without accurate seagrass information, and therefore, with very minimal understanding of potential effects on these critically important ecosystems.

This project addresses gaps in seagrass knowledge by consolidating existing data, identifying the gaps, producing new data sets, and making data more widely available.

## The approach

Project 3.5 will work collaboratively with Traditional Owners, Indigenous rangers, managers, and others to collect and analyse existing data to understand seagrass distribution across northern Australia. It will prioritise regions where there is no data, or minimal information, then undertake field surveys by helicopter, drone or boat.

Emerging monitoring technologies will be evaluated, alongside innovations in modelling and analysis.

Accessibility and useability of data will be increased through information products which will be developed and made publicly available.

Information sharing will be tailored to the various groups that utilise seagrass data.

## Expected outcomes

- Regional planners and managers supported with accurate information on seagrass distribution.
- Indigenous rangers and Traditional Owners participating in surveys and reporting.
- Innovative technology and processes that support Indigenous rangers and managers in remote areas.

*FRONT: Seagrass exposed at low tide by TropWATER.*
*BACK: Helicopter-based seagrass survey by TropWATER.*

## Project leaders


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