

To Whom it may concern

The dugong (*Dugong dugon*) is an example of a marine mammal whose survival is critically endangered by the proximity of its habitat to nearshore human settlements. Outside of Australia, the country with the largest estimated dugong population, dugongs only survive in fragmented population groups in the Eastern hemisphere. Neither the number of dugongs remaining in these groups nor the range of its habitat is known outside of incidental sightings and the reports of fishers (Marsh *et al.* 1999). The IUCN classifies the dugong as vulnerable on a global scale based on declines in occurrence and quality of habitat, and human exploitation (Hilton-Taylor 2000). The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) has banned international trade in dugong products.

The urgency of research in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, being remote and biodiverse islands, is exacerbated by rapidly escalating logging operations, and an increasing number of people immigrating to the coastal areas of the islands. The seagrass system that dugongs depend on is extremely sensitive to coastal pollution, as well as siltation and turbulence caused by coastal development and logging in more inland areas. As dugongs are a long-lived species, which give birth to a limited number of young, unsustainable hunting practices can quite quickly drive the species to extinction.

The overall goals of this proposed research are to assess the present distribution and population of dugongs in selected sites in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and to provide recommendations on the management and conservation of dugongs. In the past 4 years, I have, with my colleague, Kanjana Adulyanukosol of Thailand, created and implemented a repeatable and practical field protocol to provide baseline information and monitor populations of dugongs along the Andaman coast of Thailand. This field protocol was also implemented successfully in the eastern Gulf of Thailand in the winter of 2003. The potential uses of the output of this project will be many. At this time, it is critical to implement a comprehensive, integrated management campaign to conserve the remaining dugongs not only in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, but throughout South Asia. Bringing the scientific and traditional knowledge resulting from this research to local governments and non-government organizations is an important step not only for dugong conservation, but also towards an integrated coastal zone management process to conserve the critical and often overlooked nearshore coral, mangrove, and seagrass ecosystems.

I have agreed to be a technical advisor for the Greenlife Society Project.

Sincerely,

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