



Office of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies
Townsville Campus 4811
Australia

12 October 2003

To whom it may concern

Dear Ms/Sir,

The dugong (*Dugong dugon*), a threatened species, is the only surviving member of the family Dugongidae (Marsh et al. 1999) and one of only four members of the mammalian order Sirenia (sea cows). It is listed as vulnerable to extinction by the IUCN.

The dugong occurs in some 37 countries. A recent assessment based on the expert opinions and data of more than 100 international experts was published by UNEP in 2002 <http://tesag.jcu.edu.au/dugong>. I was the senior author. This assessment determined that the dugong was declining in most of its range and that the Indian sub-continent including the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was one of two regions of highest concern.

Much of the information used to manage dugong populations in Australia has been provided by aerial surveys using the standard techniques developed by my group. A typical dugong survey is conducted every 5 years and covers up to 30,000 km² of coastal waters of variable turbidity. The surveys have been used to identify the most important dugong habitats in Northern Australia as well as in the Arabia region, New Caledonia and Palau. These results have been used as the basis of conservation planning for dugongs in many parts of northern Australia, especially the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, where most of the important dugong areas now have high levels of protection.

I regard aerial surveys for dugongs in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as being of high priority for dugong conservation planning and management. I am prepared to support GreenLife Dugong project by being on the technical team to advise on the methodologies and to review the results. I have provided similar advice to the governments of New Caledonia, Vietnam, India, Japan, Malaysia, Palau, Papua New Guinea and Saudi Arabia as well as in the Northern Territory, Queensland, and Western Australia in Australia.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have further queries.

Sincerely,

Helene Marsh

Dean of Postgraduate Studies

Professor of Environmental Science