

# WORLD SEAGRASS ASSOCIATION

## Presidents Report and Discussion Paper for the World Seagrass Association Annual General Meeting November 2010

This annual general meeting of the world seagrass Association, sees a significant change in the outgoing WSA management committee (WSAMC). As President of WSA during the past 4 years I have learnt a lot as we have moved towards a more open and internationally accessible membership base. Previously, membership of the association had been principally through the dominant activity of WSA, the International Seagrass Biology Workshops (ISBW) and Seagrass Conferences. Today, anyone around the world may join, through an easy online membership application and payment, at any time. We have new members joining weekly, from a wide diversity of countries, expertise and ages. Our membership base is drawn from dozens of countries and has a great potential to grow if the association can find a productive focus beyond the ISBW meetings.

This year, ISBW9, in Thailand, follows the second world of seagrass conference where more than 100 presentations will occur. With a strong focus on issues related to the Asia Pacific region the conference and workshop will highlight interesting and important findings that have been made in recent years in seagrass research. It is with great regret that I am unable to attend due to my current medical situation recovering from surgery. I encourage the participants of these meetings to become more actively involved in the day-to-day business of the WSA.

I, and others, have heard expressions of confusion by both members and non-members of WSA as to the role and direction of the association. I believe very strongly a vibrant and lively association requires an active and supportive membership. Fundamentally, without these members, the association has a limited future. So what can WSA offer you, and what can you offer WSA?

By way of reminder, the stated goals of the World Seagrass Association (2002) are –

- Raise global awareness of the importance of seagrass by funding meeting attendance, supporting global monitoring etc
- Facilitate training and information exchange for seagrass issues – eg newsletter; student scholarship, website
- Collect and make seagrass management information readily available
- Support the ISBW series of biannual meetings
- Raise funds for WSA activities
- Ensure a herbarium of seagrass species is maintained
- Support the Bolinao Declaration
- Establish working groups on important issues such as:
  - Management parameters*
  - Restoration*
  - Reducing anthropogenic impacts*
  - Advice on seagrass protected areas*

However, at present (and remembering the running of the association is on a volunteer basis i.e. there are no salaries or funds for executive positions or administrative support positions), the organizational structure does not work well for implementing action towards these goals except as activities directed by individuals. While the outputs of individuals, organizing themselves and others can often be productive it provides a poor structure for longevity of

groups such as ours. We have, and do, work towards meeting many of the goals of the association. Our efforts are principally focused on organizational, academic and funding support of the ISBW series of biennial meetings ( <http://wsa.seagrassonline.org/meetings> ). Each meeting requires a large effort to organize, and often by people not even affiliated with WSA. There are large international monitoring programs that have their origins in WSA activities and collaborations ( <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/> <http://www.seagrassnet.org/> ).

The outgoing WSAMC have been developing a questionnaire to get more specific input to aid in the next phase of taking the association into the future by finding mechanisms to allow the members and wider seagrass community to contribute and participate in WSA activities. I encourage you all to really consider what the association can, should and could deliver remembering the limitations of time, funding and opportunity.

I suggest the membership consider two primary options for its future: the first, is to continue the association along the path of being a small independent international organization, operating with a relatively small membership base of committed and highly interested members. The second option is to consider being more formally affiliated to one or more large marine/estuarine/aquatic organizations. There are advantages and disadvantages to both. The primary advantage to maintaining a separate, although smaller, association is the independence and the ability to keep membership costs very low. At present, the membership fees largely go towards sponsoring attendance at ISBW meetings for students and other low income participants. Should the membership choose to become more closely aligned with a larger group such as the Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation (based in the USA although has a wide international membership) and their European and international counterparts, the benefits are a strong organizational structure, dramatically larger membership base, and potential for greater financial support. However, this comes at the cost of independence and potentially a strong seagrass focus. I will be supporting the work of the incoming WSAMC to further the goals of the association and move into 2011 with new vigour.

### Some indicators of the status of seagrass research in the past 2 years

After searching the 2008-2010 *Web of Science* Search Topic "seagrass\*" there were 1136 publications in the past <2 years under this topic.

The trend this decade has been for a steady annual increase in the number of publications.

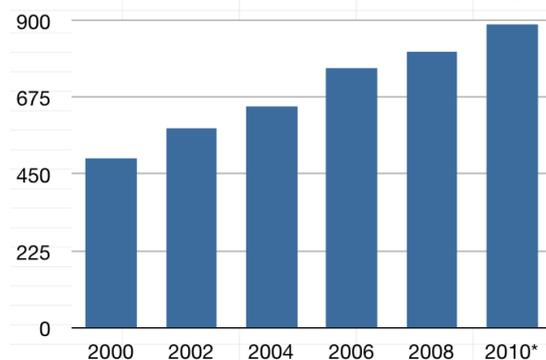


Figure 1. number of publications in *Web of Science*, found under the *Topic* "seagrass\*" for each 2 year period this decade. The 2010\* values are projected based on current rate of publication. Data searches done November 2010.

The top 10 cited references during this period are all meta-analyses or reviews:

1. Title: Loss, status and trends for coastal marine habitats of Europe, Author(s): Airoidi L, Beck MW, Source: OCEANOGRAPHY AND MARINE BIOLOGY, VOL 45 Book Series: OCEANOGRAPHY AND MARINE BIOLOGY Volume: 45 Pages: 345-405 Published: 2007
2. Title: The habitat function of mangroves for terrestrial and marine fauna: A review, Author(s): Nagelkerken I, Blaber SJM, Bouillon S, et al., Source: AQUATIC BOTANY Volume: 89 Issue: 2 Pages: 155-185 Published: AUG 2008

3. Title: Standardizing methods to address clonality in population studies, Author(s): Arnaud-Haond S, Duarte CM, Alberto F, et al., Source: MOLECULAR ECOLOGY Volume: 16 Issue: 24 Pages: 5115-5139 Published: DEC 2007
4. Title: Accelerating loss of seagrasses across the globe threatens coastal ecosystems, Author(s): Waycott M, Duarte CM, Carruthers TJB, et al., Source: PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA Volume: 106 Issue: 30 Pages: 12377-12381 Published: JUL 28 2009
5. Title: Ocean acidification and its potential effects on marine ecosystems, Author(s): Guinotte JM, Fabry VJ, Source: YEAR IN ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION BIOLOGY 2008 Book Series: ANNALS OF THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF SCIENCES Volume: 1134 Pages: 320-342 Published: 2008
6. Title: Coastal ecosystem-based management with nonlinear ecological functions and values, Author(s): Barbier EB, Koch EW, Silliman BR, et al., Source: SCIENCE Volume: 319 Issue: 5861 Pages: 321-323 Published: JAN 18 2008
7. Title: Organic carbon dynamics in mangrove ecosystems: A review, Author(s): Kristensen E, Bouillon S, Dittmar T, et al., Source: AQUATIC BOTANY Volume: 89 Issue: 2 Pages: 201-219 Published: AUG 2008
8. Title: A global review of the distribution, taxonomy, and impacts of introduced seaweeds, Author(s): Williams SL, Smith JE, Source: ANNUAL REVIEW OF ECOLOGY EVOLUTION AND SYSTEMATICS Volume: 38 Pages: 327-359 Published: 2007
9. Title: Coral reef management and conservation in light of rapidly evolving ecological paradigms, Author(s): Mumby PJ, Steneck RS, Source: TRENDS IN ECOLOGY & EVOLUTION Volume: 23 Issue: 10 Pages: 555-563 Published: OCT 2008
10. Title: Multiple functions increase the importance of biodiversity for overall ecosystem functioning, Author(s): Gamfeldt L, Hillebrand H, Jonsson PR, Source: ECOLOGY Volume: 89 Issue: 5 Pages: 1223-1231 Published: MAY 2008

I wish the incoming members of the executive all the best and thank the membership for their patience over the past couple of years with my enforced absences. I look forward to continuing to work with everyone; my current friends and colleagues and new friends and colleagues to come.

*Michelle*

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