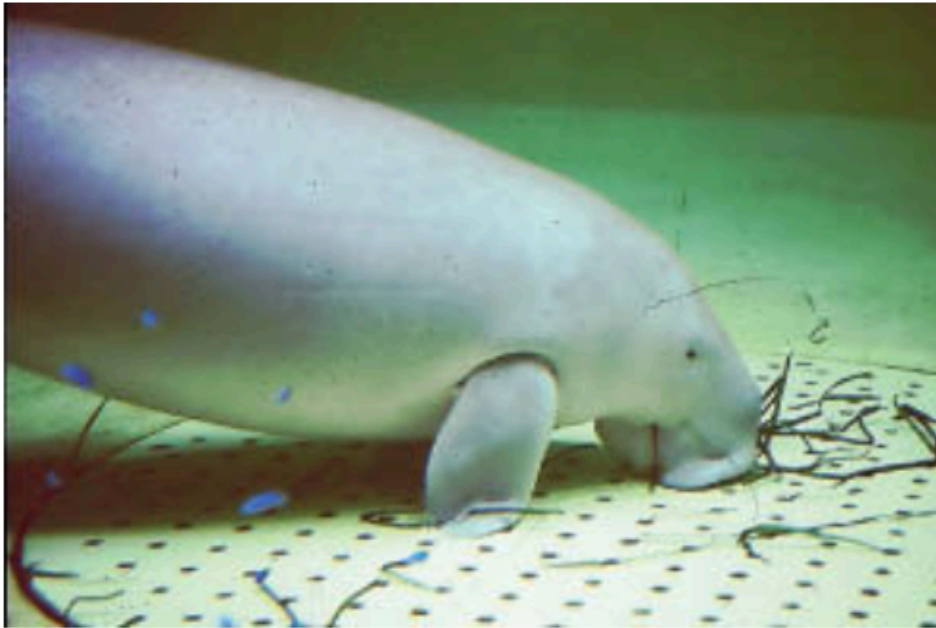


Deal to study dugongs in Qatari coastal waters

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Dugongs are listed as vulnerable to extinction by International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

DOHA: ExxonMobil Research Qatar (EMRQ), Qatar University (QU) and Texas A&M at Galveston (TAMUG) have signed a tri-party agreement to further environmental research and marine mammal initiatives relevant to Qatar.

EMRQ will provide TAMUG and QU with funding and technical assistance to increase understanding of the dugong population in Qatar's coastal waters.

Qatar is home to the largest population of dugongs outside Australia, with two of the three most important regions in Arabian Gulf.

Dugongs are vulnerable to exploitation and listed as Vulnerable to Extinction by International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Dugongs in Qatar face challenges, including incidental fishing and habitat degradation.

The project aims to develop the scientific understanding to inform environmental conservation decisions for dugongs. "By supporting research projects like the dugong study, EMRQ demonstrates ExxonMobil's commitment to conduct research that will support Qatar's sustainable development," said Bart Cahir, President and General Manager, ExxonMobil Qatar.

The program will begin by completing three research objectives: Conducting beach surveys to characterise numbers, sex, size classes, and causes of stranded dugongs; determining age of dugongs by histological processing of tusks collected from stranded animals and integrating age data with stranding data to obtain age-specific population parameters; and interviewing fishermen to locate and estimate dugong numbers in preparation for future aerial surveys.

"The work we are doing at EMRQ helps address Qatar Foundation's National Research Strategy related to energy and the environment, and demonstrates ExxonMobil's commitment to research that will support Qatar's development while protecting its valuable ecological resources," said Dr Andrew Wigton, Research Director, ExxonMobil Research Qatar. The research team is looking for help from the general public. If anyone is aware of any dugong samples or remnants (skulls, tusks, skeletons, etc.) or becomes aware of information on dugong strandings, contact Dr Mehsin Al Ansi, Co-Principal Investigator, Qatar University on 77729996. The Peninsula