

# Dugong deaths along Queensland coast spark calls for testing to prevent further losses

By Stephanie Smail 29 Sep 2016

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-29/dugong-deaths-spark-calls-for-testing-to-prevent-further-losses/7889876>



**Photo:** [The WWF wants tests done to find out how the dugongs died.](#) (Supplied: Philip Mason)

Four dugongs have been found dead along the Queensland coast in the past week, sparking calls for testing to prevent further losses.

Since last Wednesday, carcasses have been found south of Mackay, at Hervey Bay and north and south of Townsville.

One drowned in a commercial fishing net.

Jim Higgs from the World Wildlife Fund said Queensland's environment department had not done testing to find out how the animals died.

"Most of the animals we've seen over the last week have been in a situation where an internal investigation would have been possible to see if the animal had ingested something that had caused a blockage or if it had drowned," he said.

**"I just can't understand why there wasn't a priority to get these animals necropsied so we can learn from what's happened."**

Studies show there are only about 600 dugongs left between Cooktown and Bundaberg.

"Evidence suggests the southern part of the Great Barrier Reef's population might only be 3 per cent of what it was in the 1960s," Mr Higgs said.

"So every one of these animals is critically important."

Mr Higgs said conditions that wiped out coral on the reef could be having a similar effect on seagrass beds, a vital food source for the vulnerable mammals.

He said testing the dead dugongs could shed some light and help protect other animals.

"If there was a big loss in seagrass we may see similar losses to what we saw after the 2011 flooding which led to massive numbers of dugongs dying along the Great Barrier Reef coast," he said.

A spokeswoman for the environment department confirmed necropsies were not performed on any of the animals, but said tissue samples were collected from two of the dugongs.

She said more detailed tests were only done if the animal died recently, could be safely retrieved and if it was likely the cause of death would be clear.



**Photo:** [This is one of four dugongs to have died on the Queensland coastline during September.](#) (Supplied: Philip Mason)