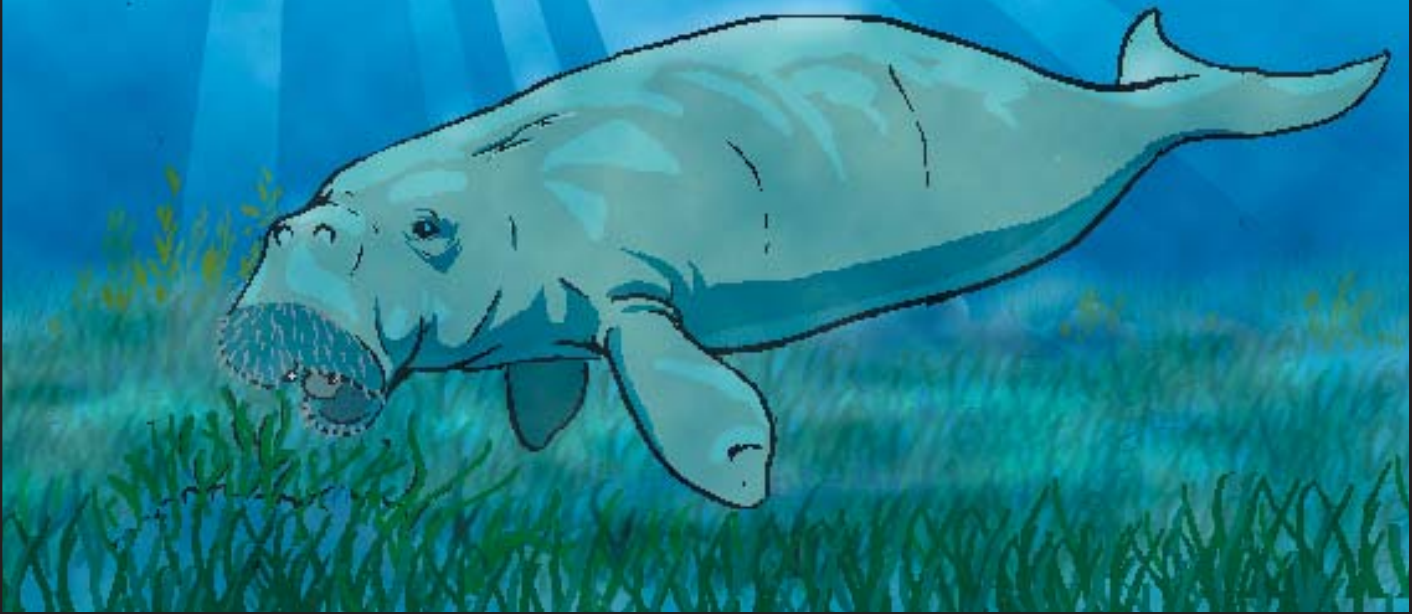




Band 3

Reading Stimulus

Dugongs



Dugongs, or sea cows as they are sometimes called, are marine mammals. They can grow to about three metres in length and weigh as much as 400 kilograms. They are the only marine mammals in Australia that live mainly on plants. The name sea cow refers to the fact that they graze on the seagrasses, which form meadows in sheltered coastal waters.

LIFE IN THE SEA

Dugongs swim using their whale-like fluked tail and they use their front flippers for balance and turning. Their movements are often slow and graceful. They have a rounded head with small eyes and a large snout. The nostrils are at the top of the snout and, being mammals, dugongs must surface to breathe.

However, unlike other mammals such as dolphins, porpoises and some whales, dugongs cannot hold their breath for very long. They can only stay under water for a few minutes.

Dugongs have poor eyesight but acute hearing. They find and grasp seagrass with the aid of coarse, sensitive bristles, which cover the upper lip of their large and fleshy snout. During the mating season, male dugongs use their tusks to fight each other.

DISTRIBUTION

Dugongs inhabit the shallow, tropical waters throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Most of the world's population of dugongs is now found in northern Australian waters between Shark Bay in Western Australia and Moreton Bay in Queensland.

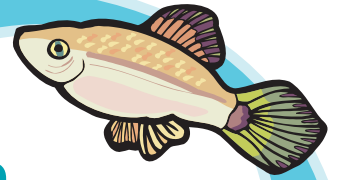
THREATS TO SURVIVAL

Their slow breeding rate means that dugongs are particularly susceptible to factors that threaten their survival. These include:

- illegal hunting
- death or injury from passing boats
- drowning from entanglement in fishing nets
- habitat loss due to the destruction of seagrass meadows through dredging and pollution.

Kombumerri

Saltwater People



The Kombumerri Aboriginal people live in the Gold Coast region of Queensland and have a long history of using traditional technology.

Kombumerri people, like Aboriginal people everywhere in Australia, were very skilful at making the most of the resources their country offered them and at developing a technology suited to their environment.

Arabin or hunting nets were a useful multi-purpose hunting and food-gathering tool used by Kombumerri men. With them they could catch fish, smaller marsupials, brush turkey and other such bush birds, water fowl and prawns. No doubt it took considerable skill and practice for men to be able to hunt successfully with these nets. It would have taken equal skill to construct the fine-meshed net and to attach it to its cane frame. Being both a coastal and riverine people, they developed fishing lines and fishing spears as well as nets since the seas and rivers provided a variety of fish, turtles, crayfish, crabs, dugong and shellfish, all of which called for different technology for hunting or collecting them.

An important ally of the Kombumerri in catching fish was the dolphin. This alliance was well-recorded. As early as 1856, a visitor reported to the London Zoological Society how, when they sighted a shoal of mullet, Kombumerri men would signal to their dolphins by hitting the water with their spears. The dolphins, to whom they had even given individual names, would then chase the shoal towards the shore. There, trapped in the shallows, with the dolphins stopping them from escaping back to sea, men using their arabin and spears were easily able to catch large quantities of fish to feed their own families and to share with their relations and friends. According to this report the relationship was of long standing, going back long before men could remember. So strong was the relationship that men and dolphins

would splash about in the water together and dolphins would delicately take fish offered to them on the point of a spear.

