

**Relative Abundance, Spatial distribution, Habitat-Use Patterns and Risk of Dugongs
(*Dugong dugon*) in Calauit Island, Philippines**

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Abstract

Dugong (*Dugong dugon*) populations are known to be declining throughout its range because of by-catch fishery, direct hunting, boat collisions, and rapid coastal development. It is categorized as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List, indicating a high risk of extinction in the wild in the medium-term future. In the Philippines, dugongs are considered Critically Endangered based on Section 2 of DENR Administrative Order No.2004-15. Understanding the ecology of dugongs, its seagrass habitat and their interaction with coastal inhabitants is important towards the effective conservation of dugongs. This study aims to understand the dugongs in Calauit Island, Busuanga by inferring its (1) relative abundance and spatial distribution, (2) habitat-use patterns, and (3) risk associated with the remaining population, using various methods such as simultaneous land-based surveys and rapid seagrass assessments in Calauit Island, and focused group discussions and key informant surveys in neighboring coastal barangays such as Buluang, New Quezon and Cheey. A GIS spatial analysis of all the data will be performed to help in identifying priority areas for dugong conservation in the island. Ultimately, this study would like to provide recommendations on how to strengthen community-based conservation efforts on the management of dugong habitats at local and national level.