

Garrigue et al 2008\_MMS

New Caledonia is at the eastern limit of the dugong's range. In June 2003 standardized dugong aerial survey methodology was used to estimate the abundance and distribution of dugongs in the coastal waters of New Caledonia, resulting in a population estimate of  $1,814 \pm SE 332$ . This represents the largest concentration of dugongs in Melanesia and one of the largest populations in the world, outside Australia and the Arabian region. Calves comprised 7.2% of the population. The observed density of dugongs was highest in the center and southern part of the west coast of the island but not significantly different from the density on the north west and north east. In the central west region, sightings were associated with a pass in the barrier reef and up to a third of the on-survey sightings were outside of the barrier reef. The dugong distribution we observed during June 2003 differs from the reported locations of historical hunts in several respects.