

## Dugongs (Sea Cow)

*Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Species*

### Why in News?

*A recent UAV-based survey by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) estimated 270 dugongs in Tamil Nadu, and the State has announced the setting up of India's first Dugong Conservation Centre.*

- It is the **largest marine herbivorous mammal**.
- **Scientific name** - *Dugong dugon*.
- **Family** - *Dugongidae*.
- **Habitat** - They are found in calm, sheltered, nutrient-rich shallow waters, usually within 10 metres of depth close to the shore.
- **Distribution** - Dugongs occur only in tropical and sub-tropical waters of the Indo-Pacific region, with an extensive range across 37 countries and territories from East Africa to Vanuatu.
  - **In India** - They are primarily found in the **Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay, Gulf of Kutch, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands**.
- **Regional extinction** - The dugongs that inhabited waters off the Odisha, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh coasts two centuries back have now become extinct.
- **Population** - Palk Bay (158 individuals) and Gulf of Mannar (112 individuals) together represent the largest viable dugong population in India.

*India's first Dugong Conservation Reserve was established in September 2022 by the Tamil Nadu government in the Palk Bay region.*

- **Characteristics - Size** - They can grow over 300 kg in weight and measure about 3.0-3.5 metres in length.
- **Behaviour** - They usually live in groups limited to 5 to 7 individuals among the seagrass beds.

- During active breeding, mother and calf are found in pairs.
- **Diet** - Each dugong consumes 30 to 40kg of seagrass a day.
- **Conservation Status**
  - **IUCN Red List** - Vulnerable
  - **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** - Schedule I
  - **CITES** - Appendix I.
- **Threats** - Habitat degradation, destructive fishing practices, and the impacts of climate change.



## References

1. [The Hindu | Dugongs](#)
2. [The Hindu | India's first dugong reserve in Palk Bay](#)