

### **Project Update: August 2024**

Over the past few months, we have conducted two field surveys around the Sibu-Tinggi Archipelago, targeting the periods post-northeast monsoon (April) and inter-monsoon (July) 2024. Each survey spanned 13 to 14 days, including travel time. Our data collection methods included drone-based aerial surveys and environmental DNA (eDNA) via water sampling. To date, we have completed 78 drone transects (39 in April and 39 in July) and collected 54 water samples (23 in April and 31 in July). We're gearing up for another survey in October to capture pre-monsoon data.

Our preliminary results indicate that dugong distribution in the area exhibits a seasonal pattern influenced by the availability of food resources. In April 2024, we observed no dugongs and found seagrass cover to be quite low. However, in July 2024, we were delighted to encounter a large herd, including six mother-calf pairs. The seagrass condition was significantly better during this period.

### **Field highlights:**



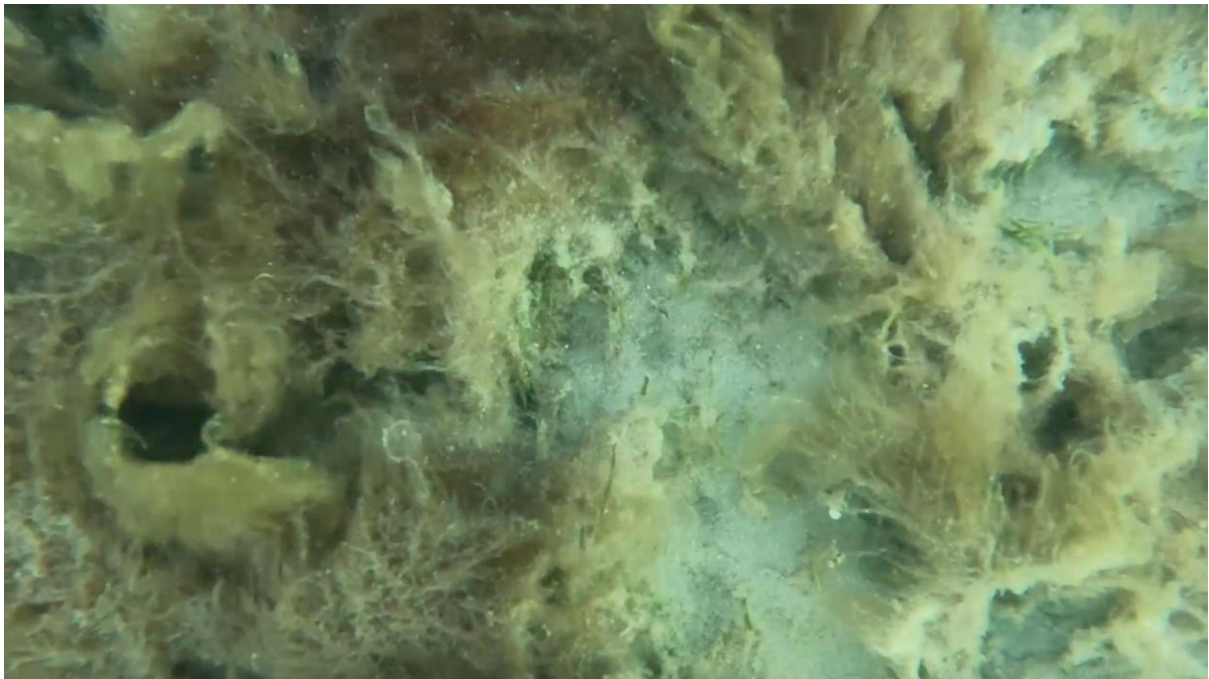
Harris piloting the drone to observe the elusive dugongs



Three replicates of seawater being pumped and filtered on-site.



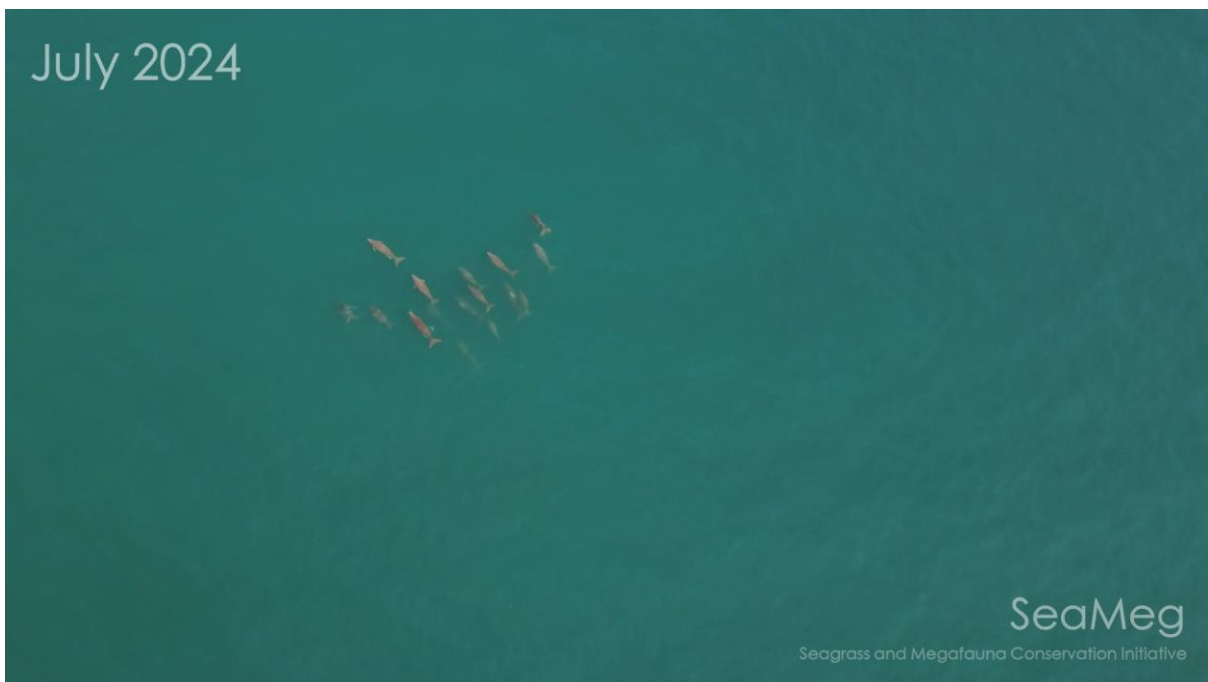
After filtration, filters were stored in the buffer solution until DNA extraction. Here, Zarifah, the research assistant, carefully removes filters from the pods.



Drop camera footage showed turf algae blooming near the main village of Sibu Island post-monsoon, with dugongs feeding in the area (see next picture).



Drone footage captured dugong feeding activities, leaving clear feeding trails.



In July 2024, we spotted dugong herds, with at least 18 individuals seen at one time.

In addition to our fieldwork, we conducted interviews with local villagers to understand their perceptions of the current status of dugongs and seagrass. To raise awareness, we have also reached out to several schools around the Mersing district, sharing our findings and the importance of marine conservation with the students. More details about these outreach activities will be included in the next report.





Our April 2024 field survey team



The July 2024 field survey team with local villagers