

Present State of Okinawa Dugong

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The precise number of Okinawa dugong is unknown but the Okinawa Defense Bureau has made a minimum estimate. The Environmental Impact Assessment for the construction of a US Marine base off Henoko, Okinawa recorded three dugongs, the individuals A, B and C. The individuals A, B are mature and have feeding areas on the east and west coasts (respectively) of the Okinawa Island. The individual C, still a calf, formerly accompanied the individual B, seems to be moving from one coast to another looking for its own feeding area.

From May to July, 2014, more than one hundred feeding traces have been recorded within the waters of Henoko and Oura. However, as the access to these waters has been restricted since January 19, 2015, we have not been able to continue our survey there. On March 4, 2016, the Okinawa Prefecture and the Abe government agreed on a temporary halt to construction in the bay. Also, the Okinawa Defense Bureau discontinued its areal dugong survey. During the summer of 2016, we observed the feeding traces, presumed to be those made by the individuals A and B, but no traces made by the next-generation dugong, C, has been found.

The Ministry of Environment, which is responsible for preserving the biodiversity in Japan, should be earnestly studying the state of endangered dugong, not only around the main island of Okinawa but also across the whole of Ryukyu archipelago, the Okinawa dugong's former habitat. The MoE, however, has remained idle for these 20 years, sitting by while the dugong population drops sharply.

We firmly believe that the time has come for Okinawa Prefecture to begin protecting its dugong population in earnest.