

Aerial surveys of Dugongs in the coastal waters of Tanzania and Kenya
K. Findlay, L. West, M.O. Mohamed & V. Cockcroft
Centre for Sustainable Oceans, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa
Sea Sense, Tanzania.
Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenya
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa
findlayk@cput.ac.za

Dugongs (*Dugong dugon*) range across the nearshore tropical and subtropical coastal and island waters of the Indo-Pacific between southern Mozambique in the west and Vanuatu to Japan in the east. The status of populations over a large proportion of the range is unknown or declining, particularly within the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) where the range historically (prior to the 1960s) extended from Somalia, through Kenya, Tanzania to Mozambique and the islands of the Comoros, Seychelles, Madagascar and Mauritius. Current information suggests that populations in the region have suffered a marked decline since the 1960s and dugongs may now only remain in small numbers in highly fragmented sub-populations in Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, Seychelles and the Comoros Archipelago. Recent line-transect aerial surveys in 2007 have identified a viable population in the region of the Bazaruto Archipelago in Mozambique. However, four similar surveys carried out in 2016 and 2017 in expected dugong strongholds in Tanzania (the Rufiji Delta and Mafia Island region) and Kenya (the northern Ungwana Bay to Lamu region and the southern Gazi Bay to Vanga region) resulted in no sightings of the species. These results suggest further declines of the Western Indian Ocean population and provide further rationale for the IUCN Red Data Status of dugongs in the Western Indian Ocean to be down-listed from the global Vulnerable to Endangered status.