

# **Dhyum the Dugong**

**By Mariana Fuentes**

**Illustrated by Fernando Pinillos**





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## Introduction

The main character of the book, 'Dhyum' is based on a real dugong that was satellite-tagged in 2010 at Mabuiag Island in Torres Strait. Dhyum was named by students from the local Tagai State College.

This book is dedicated to the children of the Torres Strait islands with the hope that they learn more about dugongs and the threats faced by the species, so they understand the importance of working to preserving them.

## About the Author

Originally from Brazil, Mariana Fuentes moved to Australia a decade ago to become a marine biologist. She has been working on marine megafauna conservation and management programs for the last ten years.

Mariana's commitment to building the capacity of local communities to preserve marine megafauna, such as dugongs, led to the development of this book, which aims to educate Torres Strait children about the perils faced by dugongs and what these challenges mean to the Torres Strait communities.

## Acknowledgements

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For more information about community based dugong conservation and management initiatives, contact the Torres Strait Regional Authority (<http://www.tsra.gov.au/>).

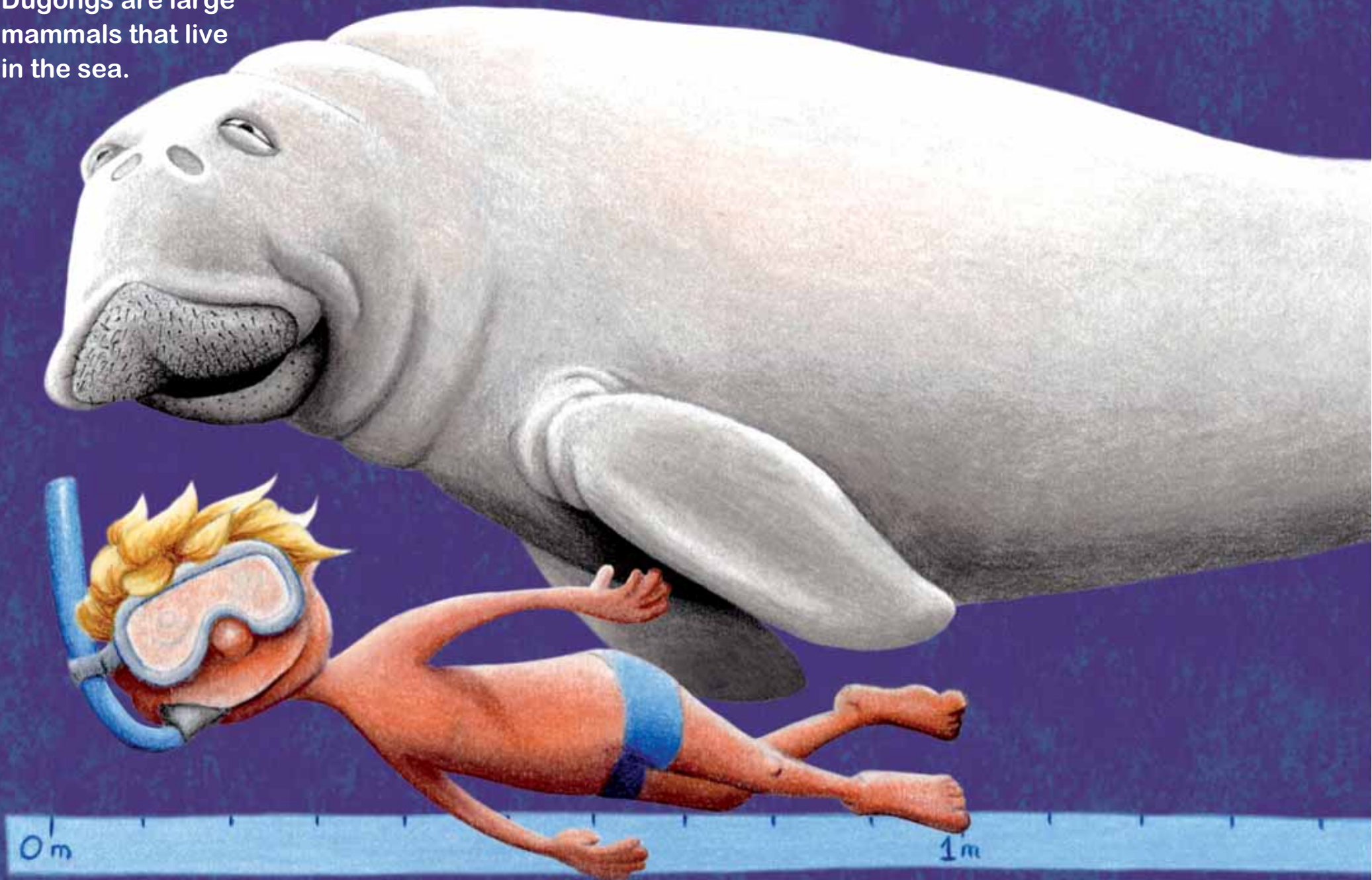




Hi, I'm Dhyum!  
I'm a dugong.  
Today I will tell you a little bit  
about myself and my family.

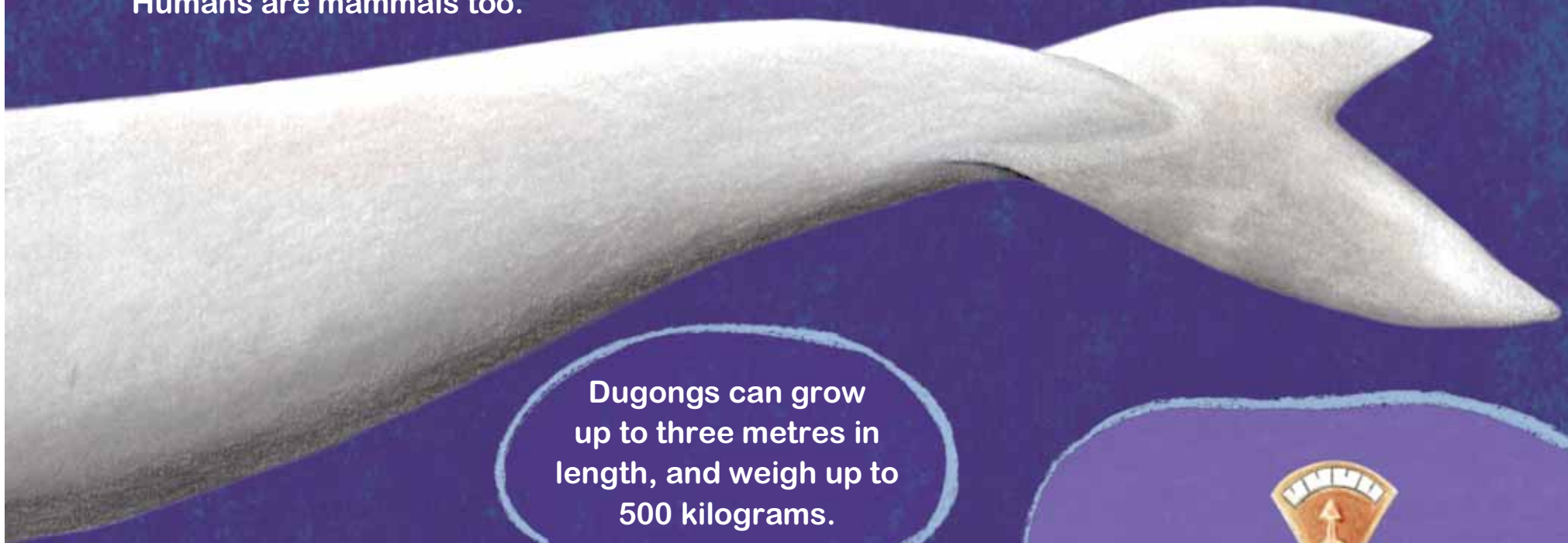


Dugongs are large mammals that live in the sea.





Mammals are animals that have hair, lungs to breathe air and produce milk for their babies. Humans are mammals too.

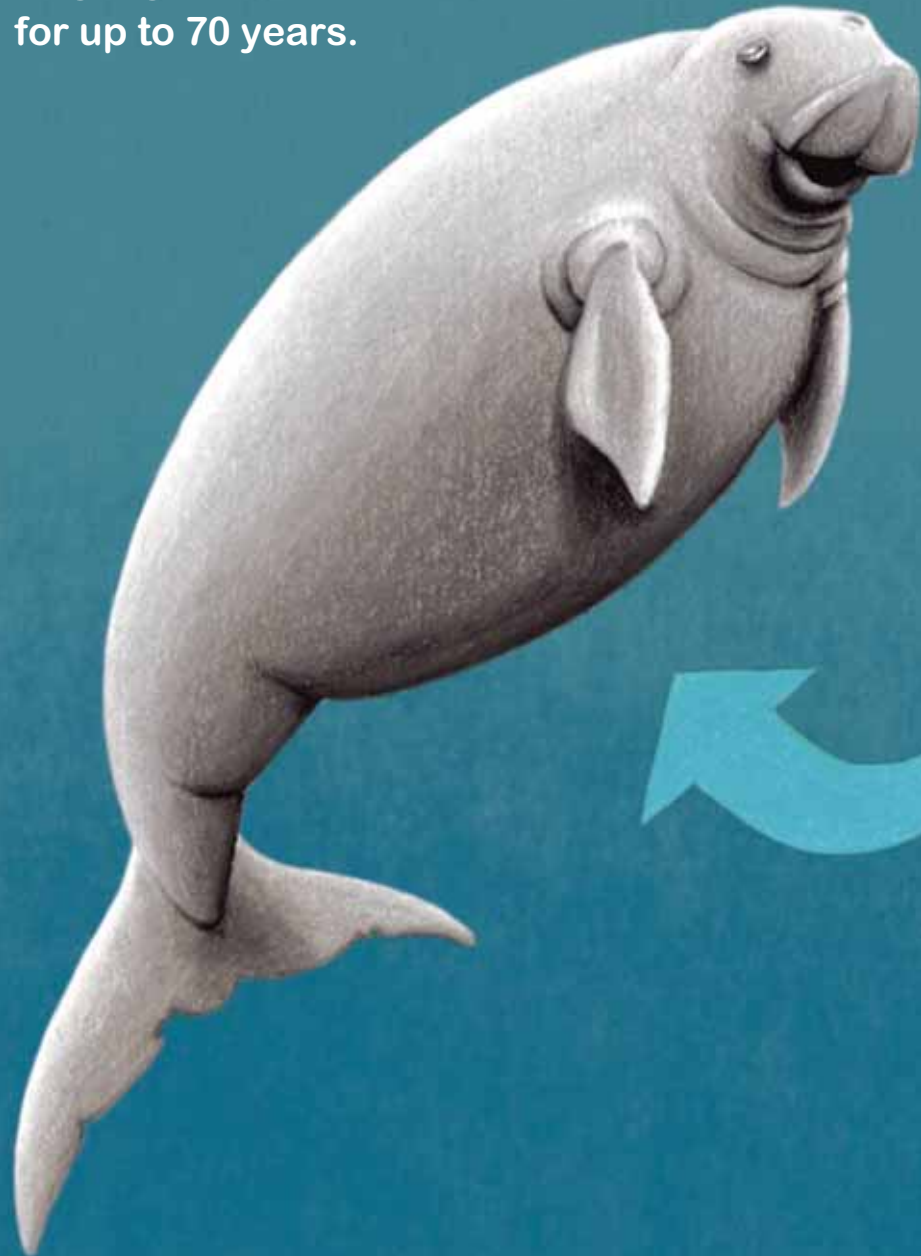


Dugongs can grow up to three metres in length, and weigh up to 500 kilograms.



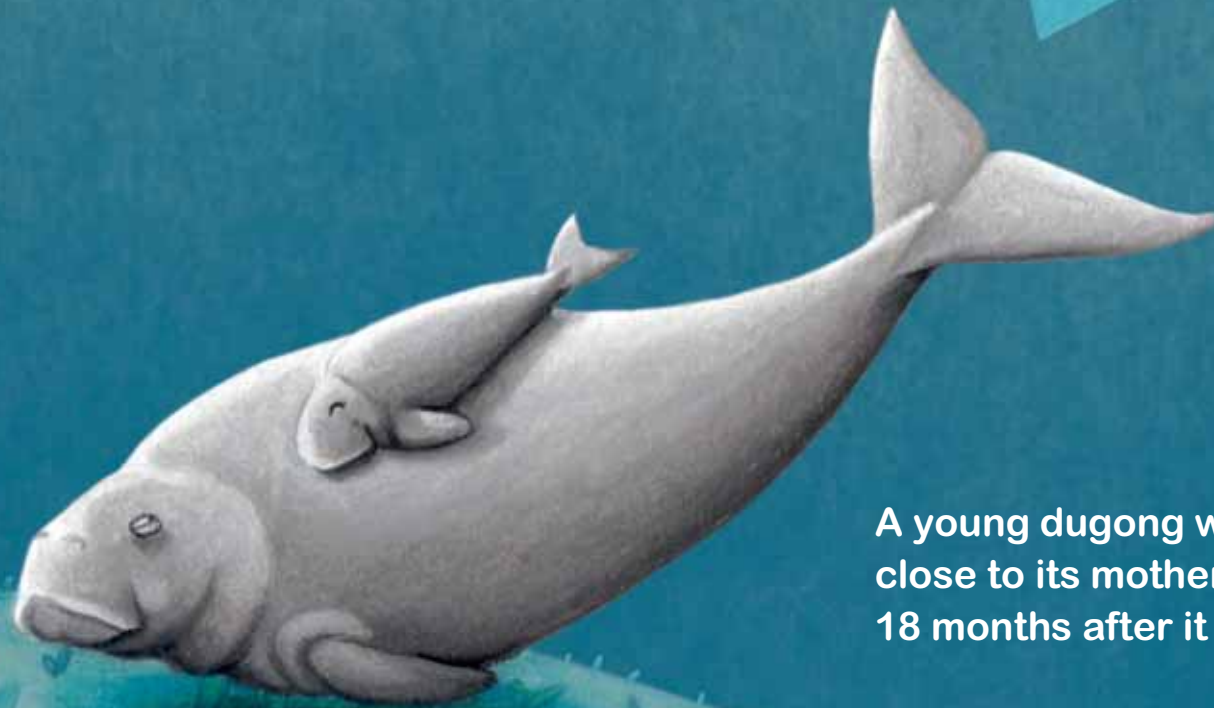
Dugongs can live for up to 70 years.

Female dugongs have their first baby when they are between 6 and 17 years of age. They will then have babies every 2-5 years.





Dugongs have one baby after 13-15 months of pregnancy.



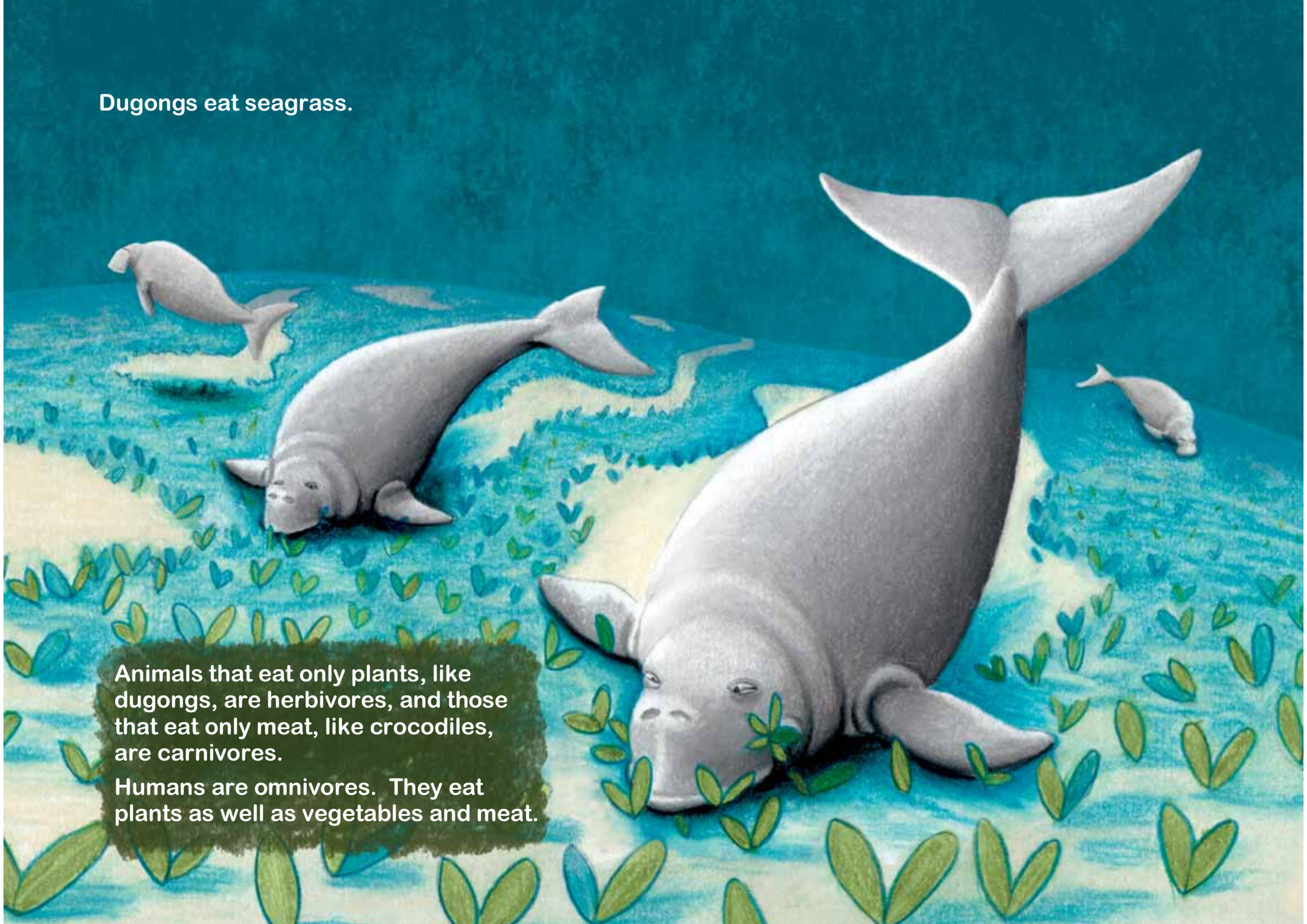
A young dugong will stay close to its mother for about 18 months after it is born.



Dugongs eat seagrass.

Animals that eat only plants, like dugongs, are herbivores, and those that eat only meat, like crocodiles, are carnivores.

Humans are omnivores. They eat plants as well as vegetables and meat.





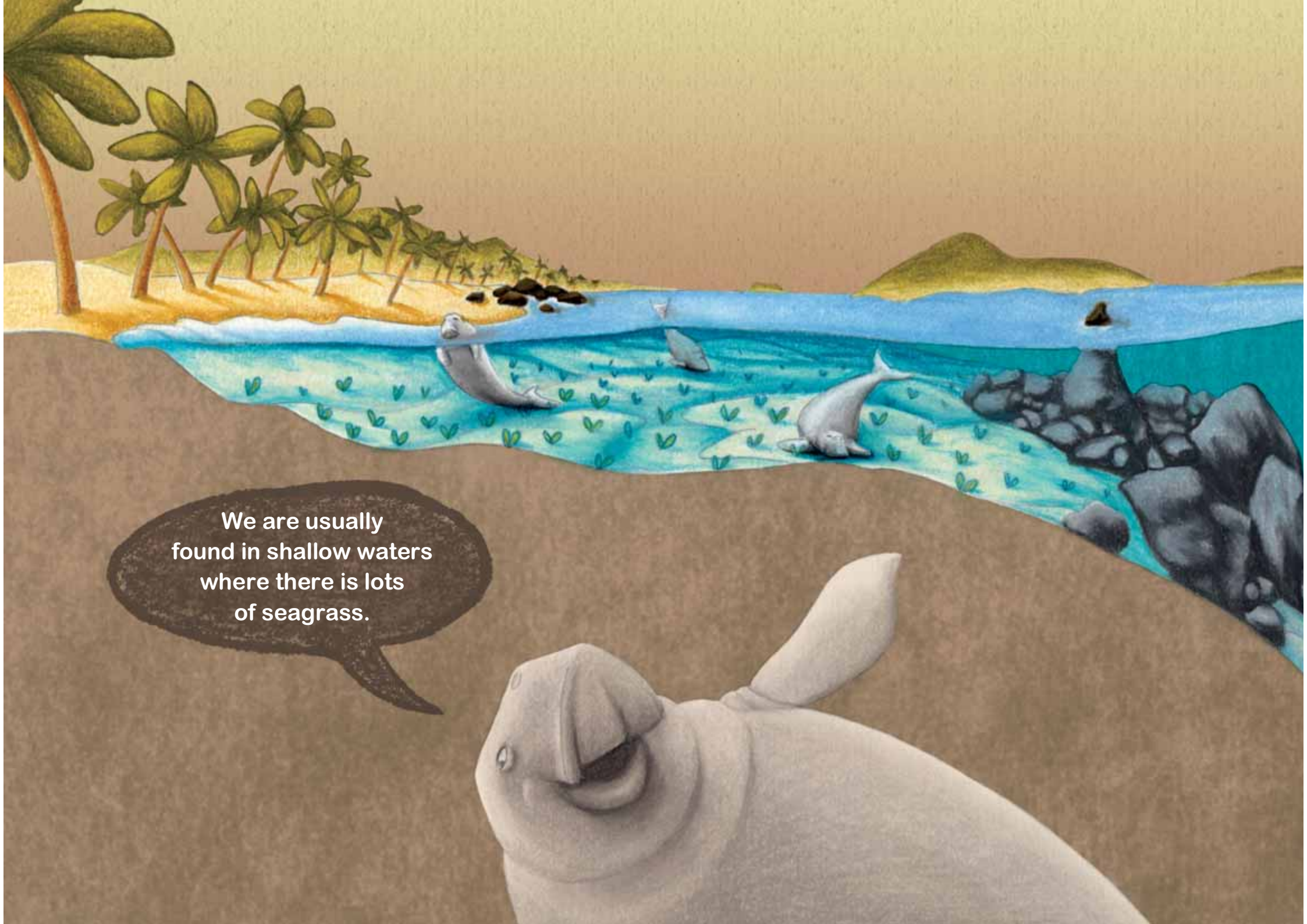
An adult dugong  
like me will eat up to  
30 kilograms of seagrass  
each day!



Seagrasses are flowering plants found in shallow areas.

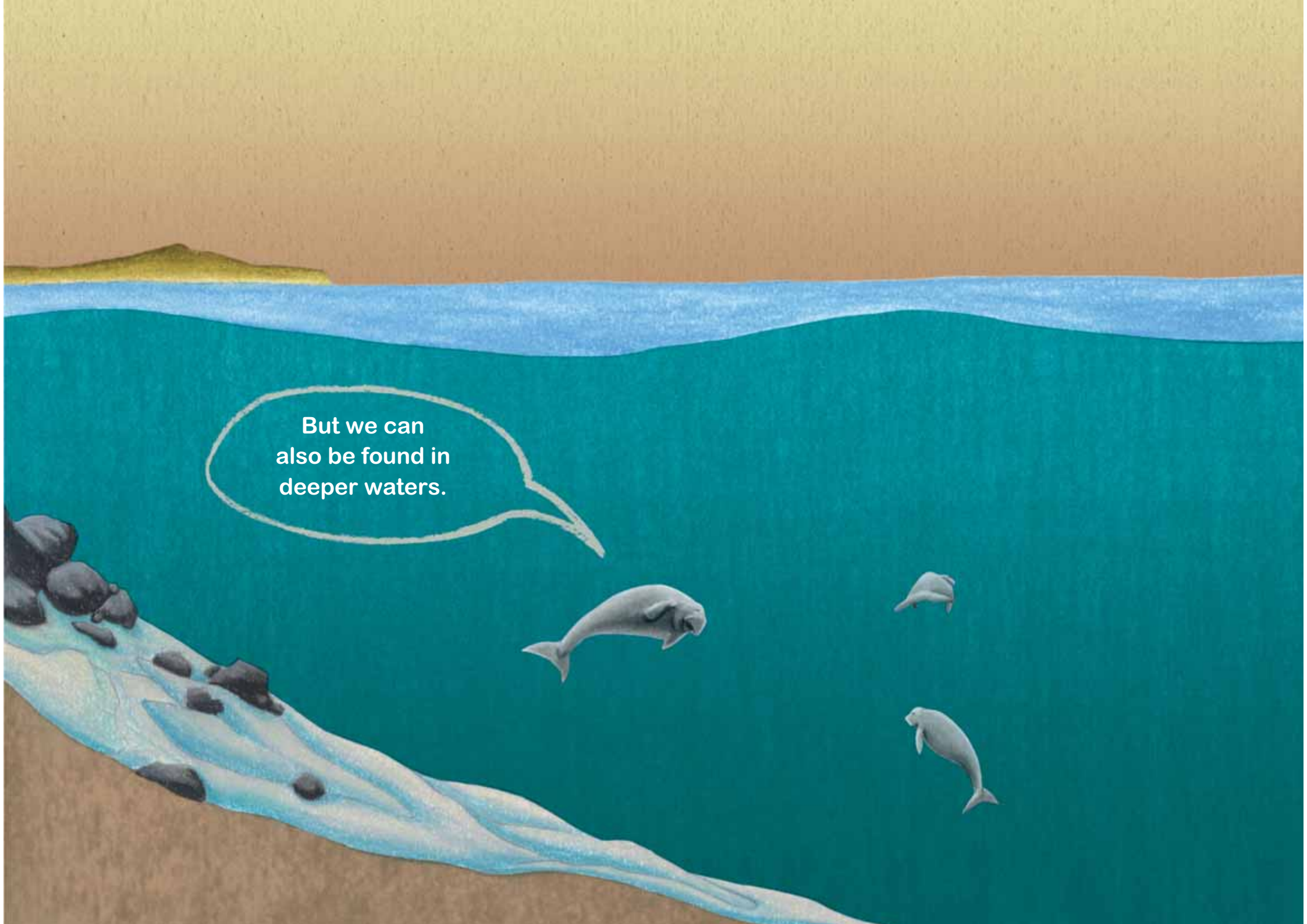






We are usually  
found in shallow waters  
where there is lots  
of seagrass.



An illustration showing a cross-section of the ocean. The top part is a light blue layer representing the surface. Below it is a darker teal layer representing deeper water. In the bottom left, there is a rocky seabed with a sandy area. Three white belugas are swimming in the deeper water. A speech bubble points to the text.

But we can  
also be found in  
deeper waters.



Dugongs can be found in at least 37 countries, from Madagascar to Vanuatu.



India

Africa

Indian Ocean

South Atlantic Ocean

Madagascar



I live in seagrass beds in Torres Strait, which is a very important place for dugongs. It has the largest numbers of dugongs in the world.

North Pacific Ocean



Vanuatu

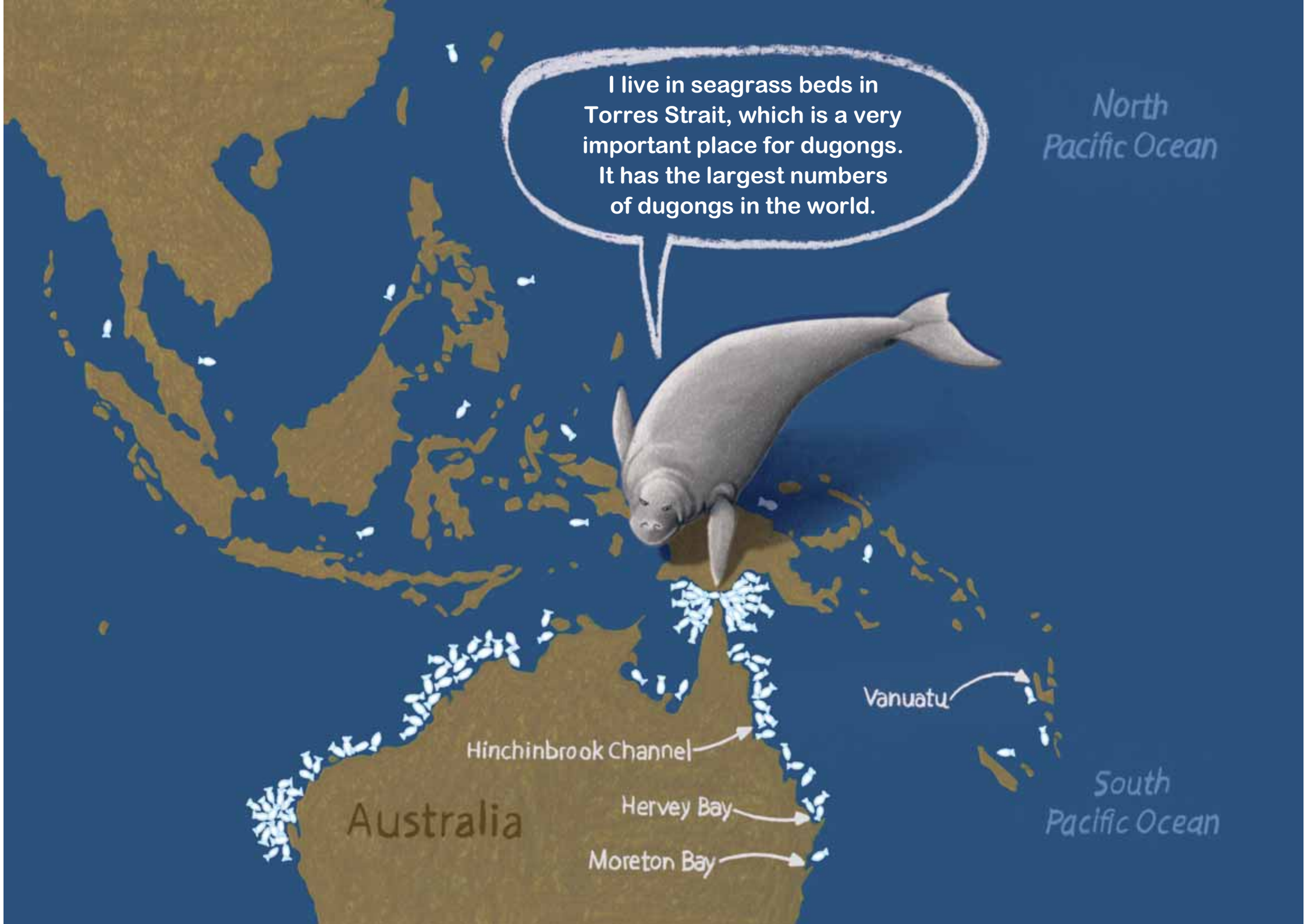
South Pacific Ocean

Hinchinbrook Channel

Hervey Bay

Moreton Bay

Australia





Human activities are causing dugongs to disappear from some places.  
The threats that dugongs face vary at each location.





It's very difficult for dugongs to escape from fast moving boats. In areas with lots of boats, dugongs can be hit, particularly if the water is shallow.

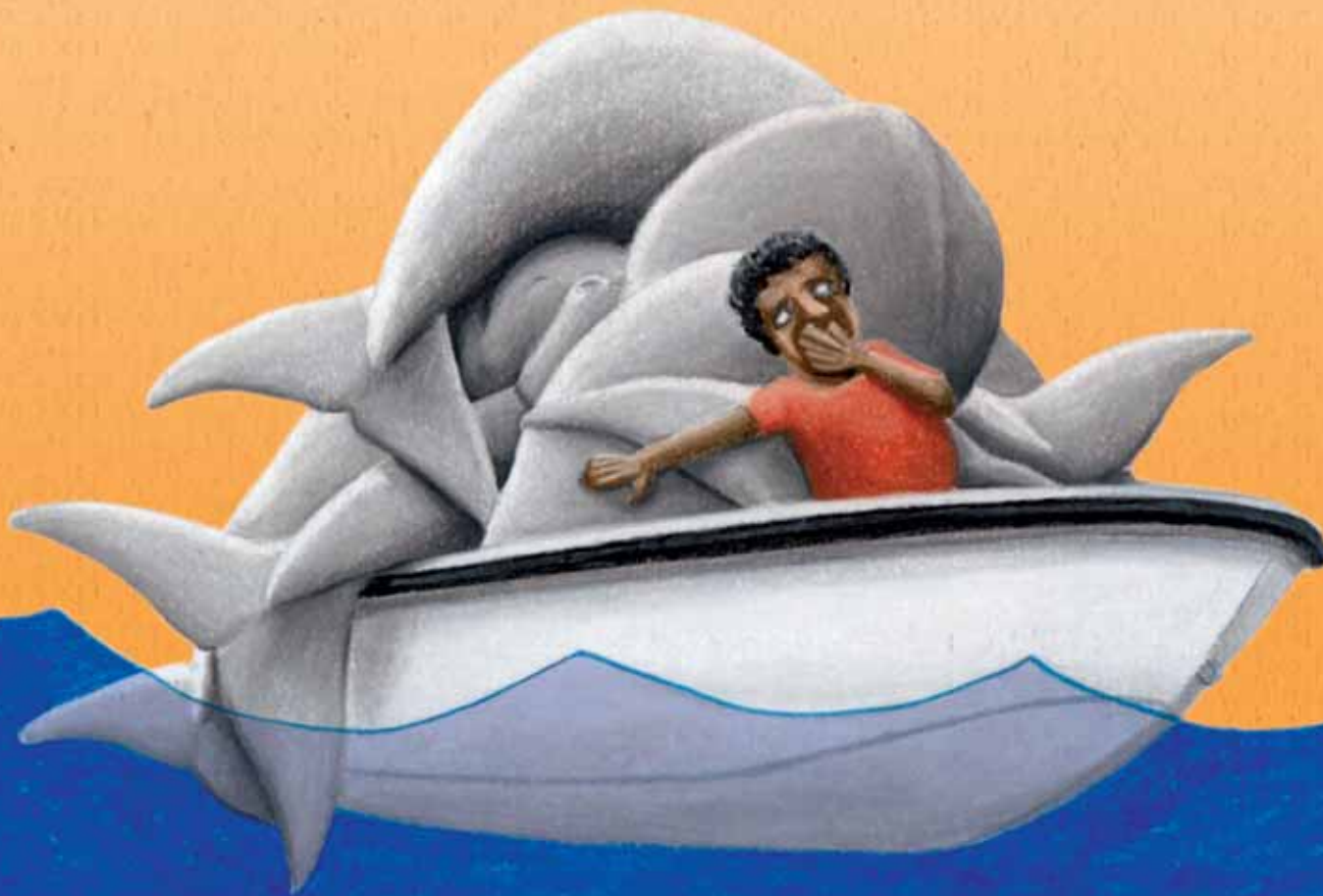




Dugongs can only hold their breath for a short time.  
If they become trapped in fishing nets they can drown.








In more remote places where local communities rely on dugongs for food too much hunting can also be an issue.



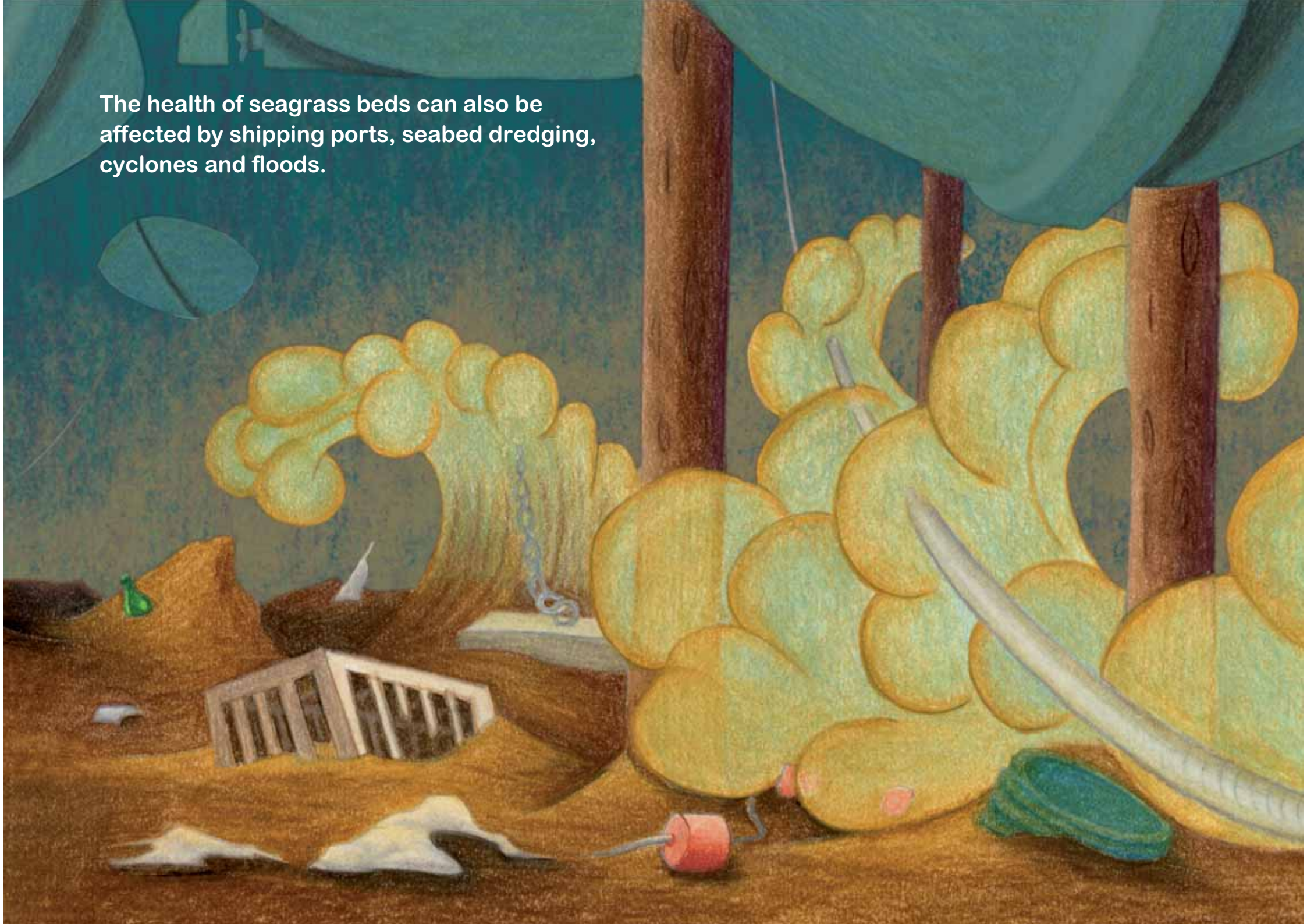
An illustration of four manatees in a seagrass bed. The water is a deep teal color. Large, flat green leaves of seagrass are visible at the top. The seabed is brown and sandy. One manatee on the right is tethered to a metal chain that is attached to a wooden post. A speech bubble from the manatee in the center contains text. A small green plant is growing from a mound of sand in the foreground. The overall scene suggests a polluted or restricted environment.

We can also be affected when seagrasses, our food source, are impacted.

Seagrass beds can die when water is too polluted.

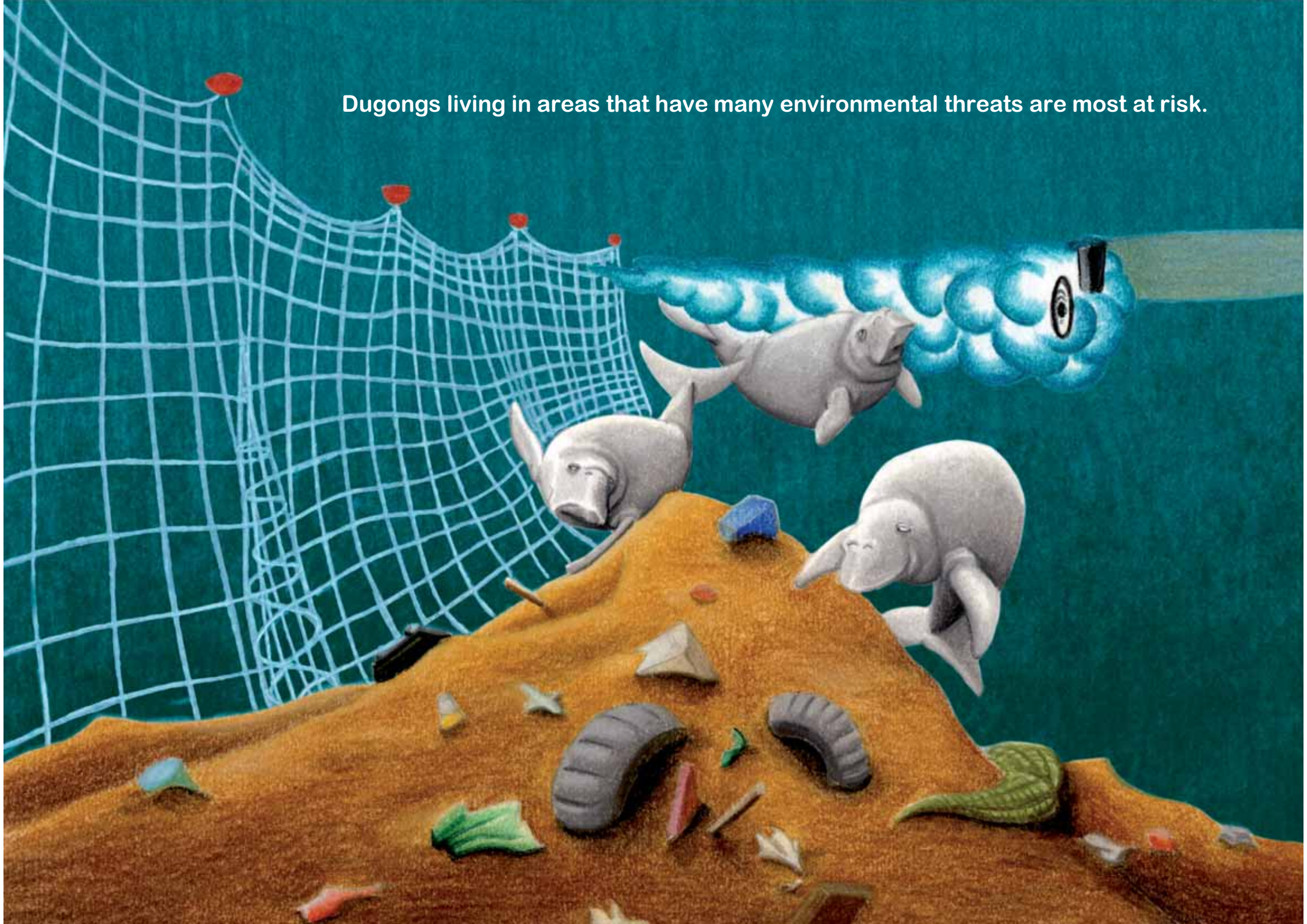


The health of seagrass beds can also be affected by shipping ports, seabed dredging, cyclones and floods.



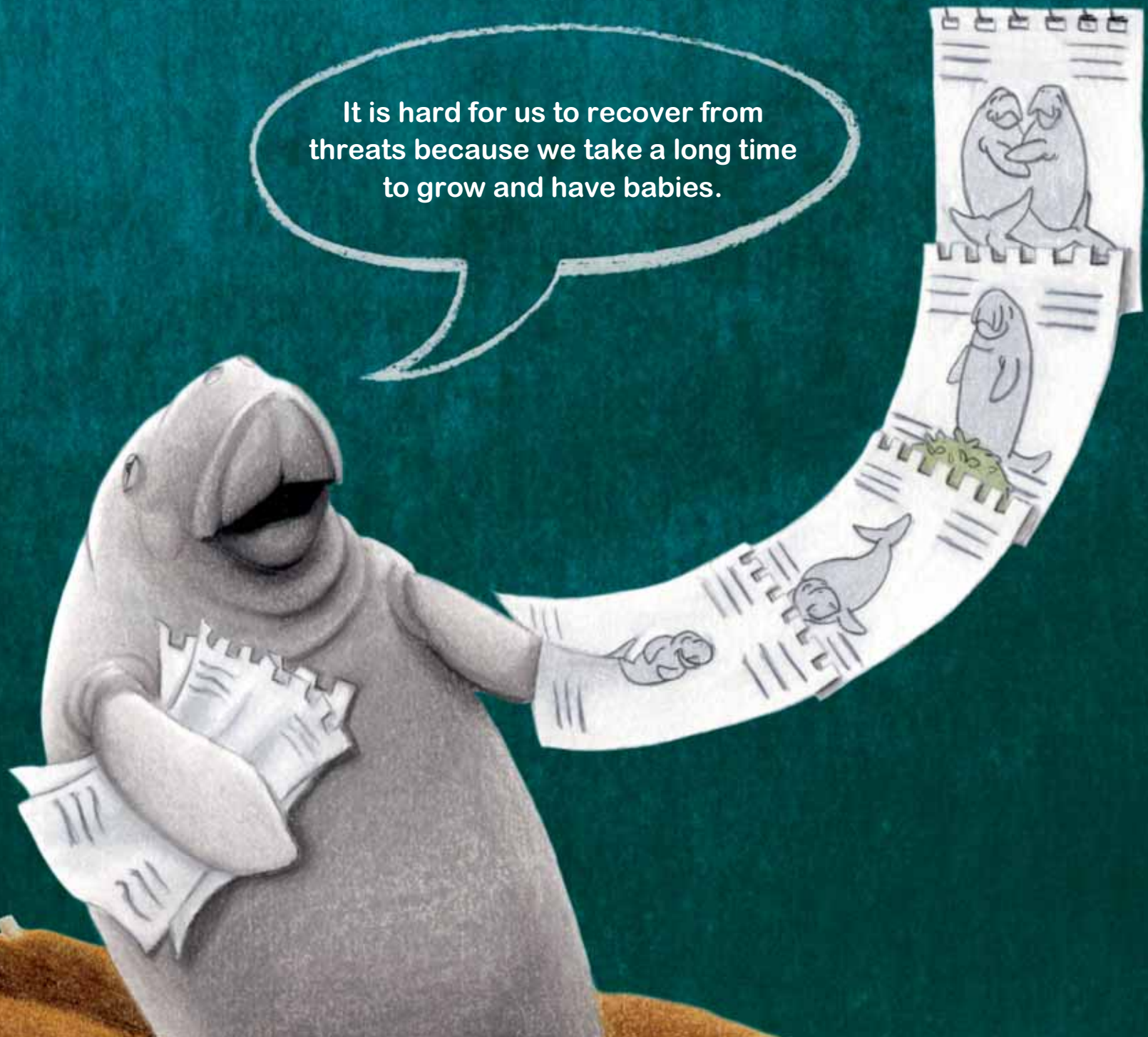


Dugongs living in areas that have many environmental threats are most at risk.





It is hard for us to recover from threats because we take a long time to grow and have babies.







A reduction in dugong numbers can be a problem to Indigenous communities because dugongs are part of Island culture.

It can also be a problem for the environment, because dugongs have important roles in marine ecosystems.

Where are the dugongs?  
They used to be here!  
What are we going to do now?









When boating in shallow waters be on the lookout for dugongs to avoid hitting them.

Several things can be done to reduce threats to dugongs.



Keep seagrass beds healthy  
by keeping the ocean clean.





Learn about dugongs so you can help to look after them.  
Find out where they live, how they move between places, how  
big their families are and how their numbers change over time.





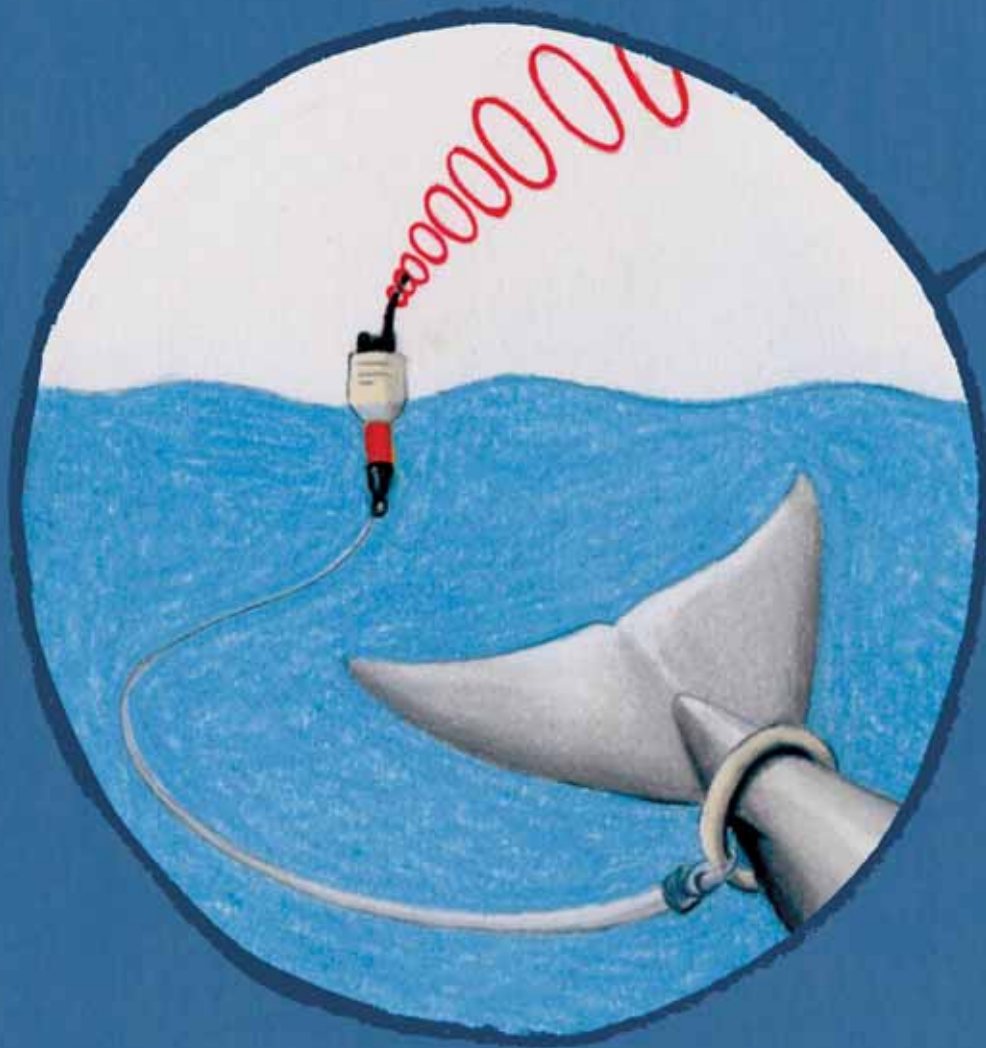
By surveying dugong populations by plane, scientists can collect information on dugong distribution and see where most dugongs are.



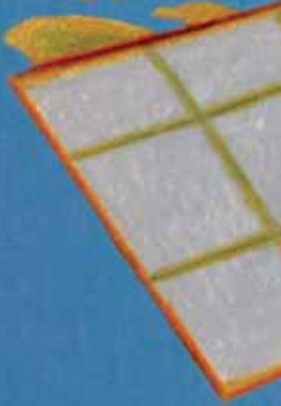
From the air we can see dugongs better.



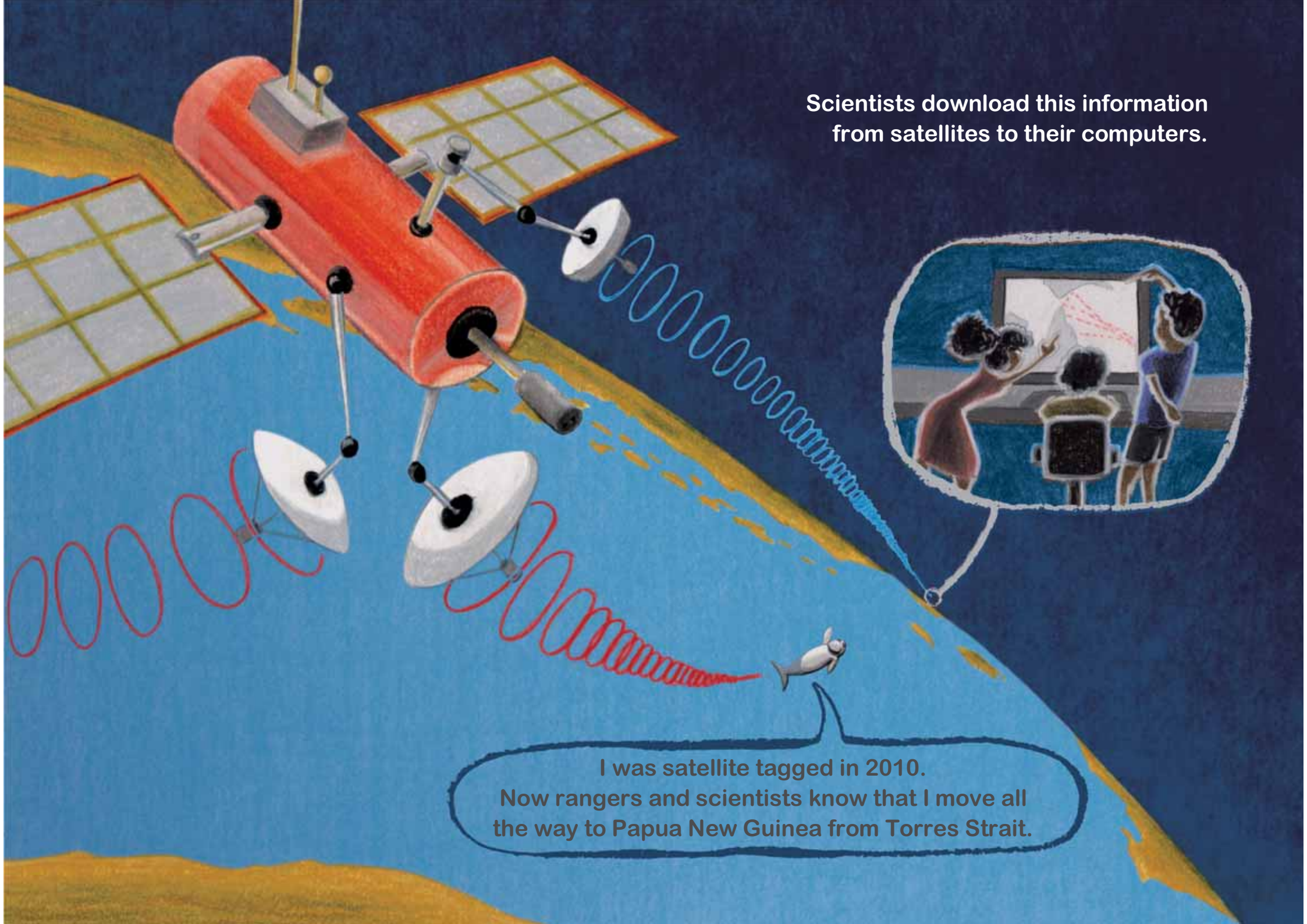
Scientists also use satellite tags attached to our tails so they can monitor where we go and how we move.



The tags send signals to satellites in space.





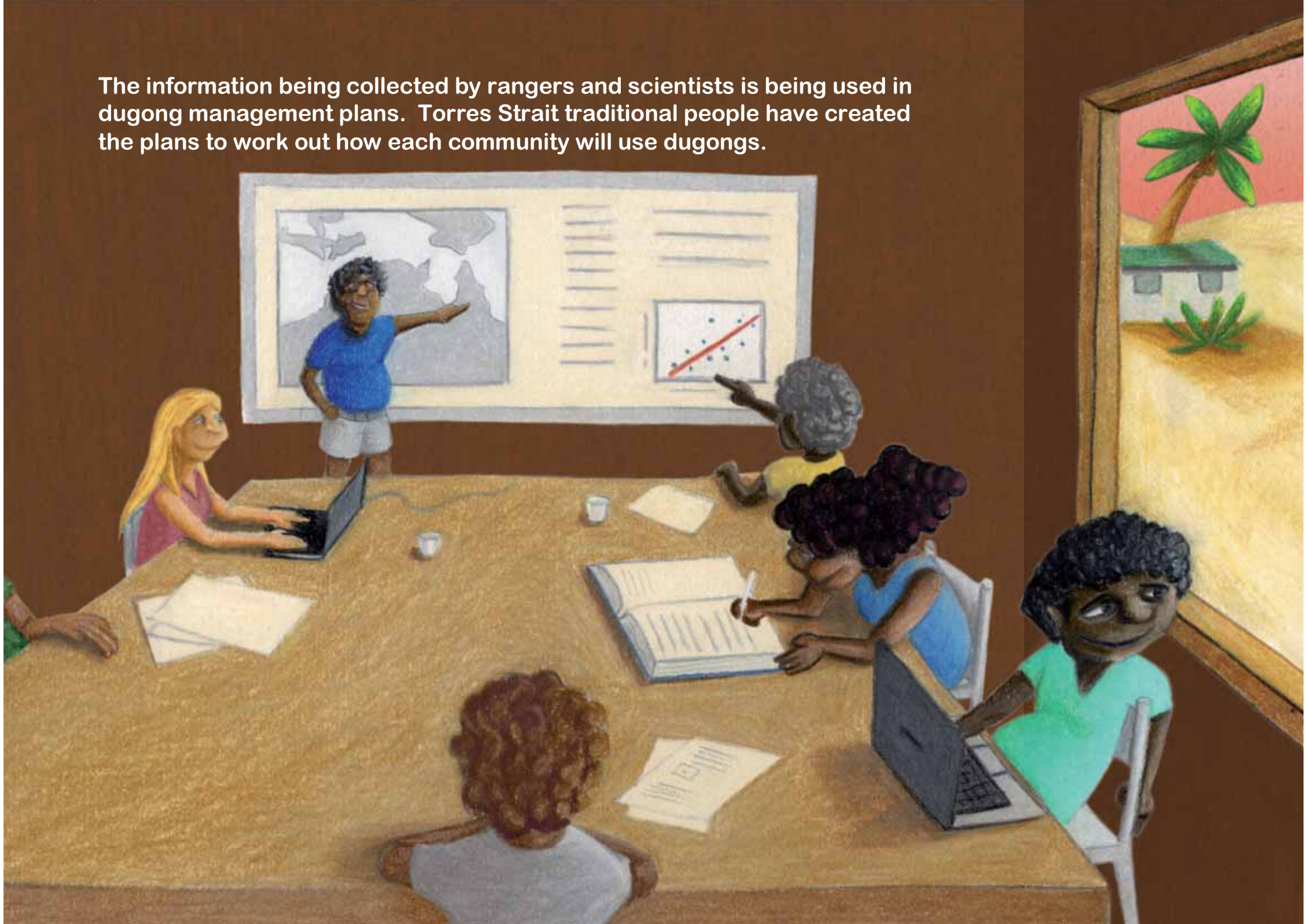


Scientists download this information from satellites to their computers.

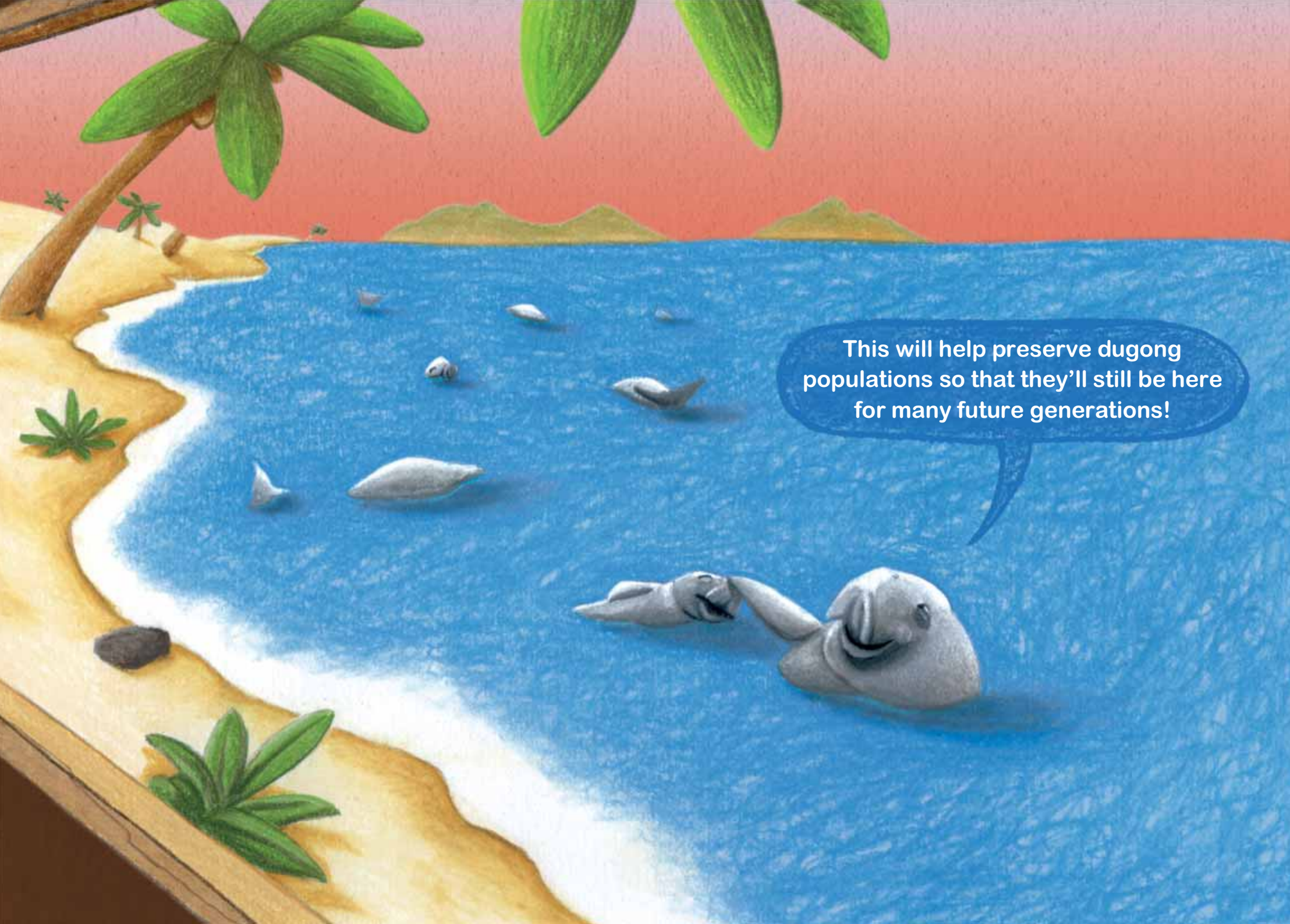
I was satellite tagged in 2010. Now rangers and scientists know that I move all the way to Papua New Guinea from Torres Strait.



The information being collected by rangers and scientists is being used in dugong management plans. Torres Strait traditional people have created the plans to work out how each community will use dugongs.







This will help preserve dugong populations so that they'll still be here for many future generations!



