

Endangered dugong found dead off Pulau Hantu

Gena Soh

A critically endangered dugong was found dead off Pulau Hantu, an island south of the Singapore mainland, yesterday morning.

Mr Robert Tan, 57, was returning with a group of scuba divers to the Republic of Singapore Yacht Club in West Coast when they saw something floating in the water.

Mr Tan, a trainer in the aviation physiology field, told *The Sunday Times*: "At first, we thought it was a shark – a big one!" But they realised it was a dugong when their boat drew nearer to the carcass.

After the carcass was hoisted onto the boat, the divers inspected it for any fresh wounds. There were no obvious ones.

Clinical research coordinator Hilary Chua, 38, another diver who was on board the boat, said: "Fresh wounds could mean that the animal was probably killed by the propellers of a boat."

An autopsy was done by the National Parks Board. The carcass is now at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum.

Mr Marcus Chua, a mammal researcher at the museum, said: "The death of a dugong is unfortunate, as it is nationally threatened. But now that there is a carcass, we can find out the cause of death."

Dugongs are marine mammals that feed on seagrass, algae and weeds. While they are known to be found in Singapore's waters, sightings



Mr Robert Tan was returning with a group of scuba divers to the Republic of Singapore Yacht Club in West Coast yesterday when they found the carcass of this critically endangered dugong off Pulau Hantu. An autopsy was done by the National Parks Board, and the carcass is now at the NUS Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum. PHOTO: ROBERT TAN/FACEBOOK

ings of these shy creatures are rare.

Dr Toh Tai Chong, a marine biologist at NUS, said that he has never seen a dugong in the wild despite having 10 years of experience diving in Singapore's waters.

"It is unfortunate that this dugong died in our waters but it is also a reminder of how rich our marine life can be in our urbanised city state," he added.

Dr Toh also pointed to the importance of the scuba diving commu-

nity in helping researchers understand the country's marine biodiversity.

"With this sighting, the local scuba diving community has played an important role in helping the scientists understand this endangered mammal, and I am confident that they will continue to play an important role in conservation," he said.

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RICH MARINE LIFE

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