

New Fellows of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW: Helene Denise Marsh FRZS

Professor Helene Denise Marsh was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW at the Society's Annual General Meeting in September 2021

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The Royal Zoological Society of NSW is happy to elect Professor Helene Marsh as a Fellow of the Society.

Helene graduated from the University of Queensland and then became a demonstrator in the Zoology Department. Then, in 1974, she moved to James Cook University (JCU) in Townsville where she has spent the rest of her career. By 1985 her ground-breaking work on dugongs resulted in her becoming the Chair of the Sirenia Specialist Group of the Species Survival Commission of the IUCN, a position which she has held since then.

By 1987 she was appointed as a Senior Lecturer in Zoology and was the co-ordinator of the MSc program in Tropical Ecology, a very popular course at JCU. In 1989 she became the Chairman of the Great Barrier Reef Consultative Committee, which provides support to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, and again this is an ongoing role. She was Chair of the Queensland Marine Parks Consultative Committee from 1991-1992.

In 1994 she became the Professor of Environmental Science /Head of the Department of Tropical Environment Studies and Geography, and in 2000 she became the Dean of Postgraduate Studies at JCU.

Throughout her academic career Helene has supervised 60 PhD and 21 Masters candidates to successful completions and has more in the pipeline, many of whom work on issues related to marine mammals and the management of the Great Barrier Reef. I really got to know Helene when we both served as members of the Resource Assessment Committee –Biodiversity and World Heritage - Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), 2000-2009. During this time Helene and I were the only biologists on that committee and I was impressed with her deep knowledge not just of dugongs but also of whales and turtles on the GBR, not only with regards to their biology but also how to best manage them. She and some of her students have worked closely with Aboriginal communities along the Queensland coast who have traditionally hunted these animals, and worked on how to ensure that their populations were sustainably hunted in order to ensure the long term viability of these incredibly important animals to these communities. Helene was a very keen supporter of the rezoning of the reef and highly respected by all those at GBRMPA and certainly knew how to work with other players on the committee representing the fishing and recreational interests as well as the traditional owners.



Professor Helene Marsh

Her willingness to serve on committees continues and she shows no sign of retiring. Helene is currently the Lead for the Threatened and Migratory Species and Threatened Ecological Communities Mission for the National Environmental Science Program based in the Resilient Landscapes Hub.

Helene is a Fellow of both the Australian Academies of Science and Technological Sciences and Engineering and

has received international and national awards for her research. She currently chairs the national Threatened Species Scientific Committee and is a Vice-President and Secretary Biological Sciences of the Australian Academy of Science. She became an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2021 for her services to marine conservation.

So Helene truly fulfils all the requirements of becoming a Fellow of the RZS NSW in terms of contributing to the conservation of Australian marine fauna, not only by her extensive publications on their biology and ecology but also in helping to develop conservation

strategies to ensure their long term survival. Much of her earlier work was in documenting the distribution of dugongs along the Qld coast and these aerial surveys now are an ongoing research program carried out by her colleagues. She has also played a major role in educating the next generation of marine biologists, many of whom have become leaders in their field. But she has also been a willing member of numerous state, national and international committees to ensure the long term viability of these megacharismatic animals.

Pat Hutchings, Royal Zoological Society of NSW



Helene Marsh (in red overalls) in 1984 near Borroloola (Queensland) after cyclone Kathy stranded dugongs on the supratidal mud flats.