

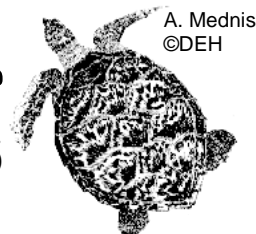
Marine Turtle Recovery Newsletter



Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Heritage

4th Edition July 2005



Welcome to the 4th Edition of the Marine Turtle Recovery Newsletter

The Australian Government, on behalf of the National Turtle Recovery Group, produces this newsletter to provide an informative update on Australian and international conservation efforts and research on marine turtles.

The newsletter is available on the Department of the Environment and Heritage website (<http://www.deh.gov.au/coasts/species/turtles/index.html>). Please feel free to pass it on to those who may be interested.

Thank you for your interest in the conservation of these wonderful creatures, and please send in any ideas, feedback or suggestions for future articles to marinespecies@deh.gov.au.

Clinton Dengate
Chairman of the National Turtle Recovery Group

Grants for turtle recovery projects

The Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage is inviting applications for projects that will contribute to the implementation of recovery plans, including marine turtles.

For more information on the Marine Species Recovery and Protection program, please visit the Department's website at <http://www.deh.gov.au/coasts/species/msrp/index.html>.

Applications close: **2 September 2005**.

New Marine Turtle Recovery Plan

The Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage is redrafting the *Recovery Plan for Marine Turtles in Australia*. The new draft plan, due to be released for public comment shortly, will be divided into two separate documents — an 'Issues Paper' and a 'Recovery Plan'.

The Issues Paper will act be an evolving document, where the outcomes of new research can be incorporated. This will allow it to be updated with current research and knowledge of biology, threats and conservation.

The Recovery Plan will be a 5-year statutory document under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, and will identify actions aimed at assisting the recovery of the species.

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Turtle Dreaming Camp on Tiwi Islands

From 31 May to 2 June 2005 a Turtle Dreaming Camp was held on Melville Island to raise awareness of marine turtle conservation and to involve the community in fitting satellite transmitters to nesting olive ridley turtles.

The camp was a component of a Natural Heritage Trust project – ‘Sea Turtle Conservation and Education on the Tiwi Islands’ which is being run through a partnership between the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Tiwi Land Council.

The camp was a great event, with around 140 students and adults from the Pularumpi School and Pirlangimpi Community attending. Activities during the camp included collecting bush tucker (mud mussels), marine turtle art workshops lead by Munupi artists, and a presentation by Dr Scott Whiting on marine turtle biology and threats to the six species found in Australia. The highlights of the camp were the Pularumpi School’s pantomime performance of the life cycle of the green turtle and the trips to the olive ridley nesting beach on Cape Van Diemen to tag and fit satellite transmitters to nesting turtles.



Jack Long (Marine Ranger), Kate Hadden (Tiwi Land Council) and Andy Lauder (Coastcare facilitator) make their entrance during the Pularumpi School pantomime of the ‘Life Cycle of the Green Turtle’ (© WWF/Tiwi Land Council).

During the camp one olive ridley turtle, named Imalu by the students of the Pularumpi School, was fitted with a satellite transmitter. To view the migration of Imalu, who is currently in the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf region, visit:

http://www.seaturtle.org/tracking/index.shtml?project_id=78



Satellite transmitter being fitted to Imalu, an olive ridley turtle nesting on Cape Van Diemen (by Zoe Cozens)

Many people, agencies and organisations were involved in ensuring the camp was a great success, including: Tiwi Land Council, Pularumpi School, WWF, Coastcare facilitator, Department of the Environment and Heritage, Munupi Arts, Tiwi Island Marine Rangers, Pirlangimpi Community Development Employment Programme, Top End Group School, Pirlangimpi Progress Association, Pirlangimpi Council, Traditional Owners of Munupi Landowning Group and Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services.

Traditional Owners sign agreement with the Queensland Government

The Juru, Gia and Ngaro Traditional Owner Groups of North Queensland have recently signed an agreement with the Queensland Government that protects Indigenous culture and conserves turtle and dugong populations.

The Memorandum of Understanding that extends between Ayr, Bowen and Proserpine formalises the groups’ self-managed hunting approval system.

The Queensland Government hopes that this will be the first of many multi-clan agreements with Traditional Owners along the Queensland coast.



Surveying Sea Country – A New Approach

The recent *North Australia Marine Biodiversity Survey* may be the first truly collaborative and cross-cultural survey of its kind for the northern Australian marine environment. Critical to the success of this project has been extensive consultation with, and engagement of, Aboriginal communities in its design, development and implementation.

The Australian and NT Governments and the Northern Land Council funded the survey. It was undertaken during November-December last year.

One of the main objectives was to investigate inshore waters around Arnhem Land and the Arafura Sea, which were last explored by scientists more than 150 years ago. The survey included mapping and investigation of seagrass habitats, which provide feeding grounds for marine turtles.

Over a three-month consultation phase, the survey team put together an innovative communications strategy with Aboriginal colleagues. This ensured that research activities, use of results and intellectual property and community processes were agreed upon before the project started. This basic courtesy and information sharing protocols have been a significant outcome of the project and will hopefully provide a strong foundation for future work of this kind.

The consultation provided an important opportunity for researchers to work with Aboriginal people to identify known seagrass meadows for further investigation, as well as identifying areas of significance to Aboriginal people that needed to be avoided during the survey.

The results of the survey will fill in important information gaps to assist marine planning and management of northern Australia's marine environment. The information gathered by the scientists will also be provided to the Aboriginal communities of Kakadu National Park and the Arnhem Land coast. The project partners would like to see the approach taken as a model for marine research projects in the future.

The final report is due late 2006 with the results being posted on the National Oceans Office website: www.oceans.gov.au.



Mardbalk Rangers from the Goulburn Islands and Terry Mahney (Northern Land Council) work together during the North Australia Marine Biodiversity Survey (by Ilse Kiessling).

Australian Government developing tourism Codes of Practice

Marine turtles are increasingly being recognised as an important resource by tourism operators. Dr Alastair Birtles of James Cook University is leading an Australian Government funded project aimed at minimising potential negative impacts of tourism and to establish World's Best Practice.

The first phase of this research project, which commenced in early 2004, developed national Draft Codes of Practice for marine turtle and dugong tourism in Australia. These were developed with input from participants from a range of organisations, including tourist industry, Indigenous organisations, researchers and non-government organisations.

Phase two, which is nearing completion, is evaluating these Draft Codes of Practice. During this process experts from Australia and overseas, along with Visitor and Key Informant Surveys at four study sites, were used to provide feedback.

For further information visit:
www.dugongturtletourism.org.

Or contact Matt Curnock (Project Manager) via email: Matthew.Curnock@jcu.edu.au or tel: 07 4781 5428



Fisheries News

Andy's 4,000KM Journey!

Andy, as he is affectionately known, is an olive ridley turtle captured as part of a 2-year project funded through a Fisheries Research and Development Corporation grant. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority has also provided assistance. This project aims to educate fishermen in issues concerning sea turtles, and includes training in safe release and handling procedures.

As part of this project, a number of turtles captured by longline operations in the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery will be fitted with radio satellite tracking devices. This is to help gather data on turtle distribution and migration. Captured turtles will also be flipper tagged, genetic samples taken and morphological measurements made.

Andy is one such turtle. He was superficially hooked on a flipper and was subsequently fitted with a transmitter. Andy was released on 3 December 2004 in the Coral Sea off the Queensland coast.



A satellite transmitter being attached to the shell of a turtle (© AFMA)

Since his release, Andy moved west into continental shelf waters and continued south along the NSW coast. By 31 January, Andy moved offshore into the Tasman Sea. On 14 February the tag failed and transmission ceased. Andy traveled over 4,000 kilometres in ten weeks. Scientists consider it amazing that an olive ridley could move such a great distance in a short time, and travel so far south.

New research into the effects of circle hooks in longline fisheries

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has commissioned a pilot study into the effects of circle hooks in Australia's longline fisheries. The aim of this research is to determine whether circle hooks—which have been shown in some overseas fisheries to reduce bycatch, as well as post-capture mortality in turtles—are economically viable and commercially practical in our fisheries.

TEDs prove their worth in the Northern Prawn Fishery

The implementation of TEDs (Turtle Excluder Devices) in 2000 on Northern Prawn Fishery trawlers has led to big reductions in large marine animal bycatch, including a greater than 97% reduction in marine turtle catches. Anecdotal evidence suggests that all species of turtles are being excluded.

The introduction of TEDs is part of a long-term program, conducted by the Northern Prawn Fishery researchers and the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), aimed at ensuring an ecologically sustainable fishery. This has included a 'Crew Awareness Program'. Crew members, trained by AFMA and CSIRO as observers during this year's northern prawn seasons, will continue to monitor the effectiveness of TEDs and record any catches of turtles, stingrays or other big fish.



'Andy' being released after tagging (© AFMA)



3rd Meeting of IOSEA Turtle MoU held in Bangkok

In March of this year, the signatory states of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (IOSEA) Turtle Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) met to discuss the conservation of turtles on a regional scale. The meeting welcomed two new signatory states—Indonesia and South Africa.

Some of the major outcomes from the meeting included:

- Reviewing the implementation of the Conservation and Management Plan and setting priorities for the following year.
- Agreeing to proceed with the Year of the Turtle campaign in 2006.
- Adopting a resolution urging sustainable fisheries practices and coastal development activities in the aftermath of the tsunami.
- Adopting a resolution urging the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and its member states to address marine turtle bycatch within the IOSEA region.

To find out more about the recent meeting, as well as IOSEA Turtle MoU, visit:

<http://www.ioseaturtles.org/index.php>.



Olive ridley turtle
(© Michael Jensen www.seaturtle.org)

What is the IOSEA Turtle MoU

The Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (IOSEA) Turtle Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is an intergovernmental arrangement under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). It aims to recover marine turtles and their habitats in the region and is made-up of twenty three signatory states. This includes Australia and countries from the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region.

2006 - Year of the Turtle

At the recent IOSEA Turtle MoU meeting, signatory states agreed to initiate and support the 2006 Year of the Turtle campaign.

The Year of the Turtle will promote broad turtle conservation themes, and is expected to include an array of local, national, and international activities. It has been suggested by signatory states that the year could be used to launch long-term conservation activities, develop national action plans and declare trans-border protected areas.

To guide the preparations for the campaign, a Year of the Turtle Steering Committee has been formed. Australia is a member of this committee and has recently provided financial support to the IOSEA Turtle MoU Secretariat for promotion and on-ground activities.

The Australian Government will act to promote and encourage conservation actions during the year. To keep updated on the campaign as it develops visit:

<http://www.ioseaturtles.org/index.php>.

Where art thou turtle?

Did you know that Australia's six marine turtles migrate outside Australia? IOSEA Turtle MoU has developed an interactive web page that displays migration patterns and nesting sites for marine turtles in the region. Check it out on:

<http://www.ioseaturtles.org/mapping.html>