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Dugong and marine turtle project wins NT Landcare Award for Indigenous alliance

The North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) received accolades for a unique dugong and sea turtle management program at a ceremony held at Parliament House in Darwin, October 2007.

The program is the first of its kind in Australia and is founded on the Traditional Knowledge and expertise of Indigenous Saltwater People. Driven by the concerns of Traditional Owners for maintaining healthy populations of dugong and sea turtle, the NAILSMA Project brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous coastal managers to look after these internationally significant animals.

The Australian Government Coastcare Award was accepted on behalf of the Dhimurru, Anindilyakwa and li-Anthawirriyarrá Rangers from the NT and other ranger and community groups across north Australia by Project Coordinator Rod Kennett and Dhimurru Director Djawa Yunupingu.

"We are working together across north Australia to make sure our children will benefit from the sea resources our ancestors enjoyed", Mr Yunupingu explained.

North Australia is one of the last great strongholds for dugongs and marine turtles on the planet and they are important natural and cultural resources for Australia.

Traditional Owners know the long-distance migrations of these animals' means the

responsibility for managing them extends beyond the boundaries of their own traditional lands and sea estates.

Executive Officer of NAILSMA, Mr Joe Morrison explains more about the project.

"Building a network of Saltwater People across north Australia in partnership with researchers, government and industry is an important part of the NAILSMA project. These partnerships bring together Traditional Knowledge and western science for better understanding and management of dugong and marine turtles.

"NAILSMA's approach is proactive, involving habitat monitoring and restoration, rescuing stranded wildlife, tagging turtles and monitoring nests; recording and sharing traditional knowledge about turtles and dugongs, their habitats and behaviours; and educating and raising awareness about the need to look after turtles and dugongs".

Project partners across Australia include the Northern Land Council, Anindilyakwa Land Council, Kimberley Land Council, Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation and Torres Strait Regional Authority.

The NAILSMA Dugong and Marine Turtle Project is funded by the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust. The Alliance is now in the running for a National Landcare Award, to be announced in Canberra next year.

CONTACT Rod Kennett, Dugong and Marine Turtle Project Coordinator.

T 08 8946 6271 | M 0427 978 952 | F 08 8646 6388 | E marine@cdu.edu.au | W www.nailsma.org.au

INTERVIEWS: Joe Morrison is available for interview from November 5 2007. Interviews with on-ground project participants can be arranged. Contact Project Coordinator Rod Kennett to arrange an interview.

PHOTOGRAPHS: Permission is granted for the following photographs to be reproduced to accompany this story only. For all other uses contact Project Coordinator Rod Kennett. To receive high resolution copies, email marine@cud.edu.au

- **NAILSMA1.jpg:** li-Anthawirriyarrá Sea Ranger Damien Pracy demonstrating turtle measurement and tagging to school children. South-west Gulf of Carpentaria, Northern Territory. Courtesy Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Association.
- **NAILSMA2.jpg:** Babula Marika (left) and Nalkuma Burrawanga of Dhimurru Land Management releasing a green turtle during a beach debris clean-up. Courtesy Dhimurru Land Management.
- **NAILSMA3.jpg:** Anindilyakwa Ranger Vince Lalara and volunteer ranger Eric Amagula rescue a turtle from discarded fishing nets. Courtesy Anindilyakwa Land Council.