

SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:

- GARMA—Project Officers present at the Garma Festival
- AWARD—NAILSMA Dugong and Turtle Project win Banksia Award finalist
- Tudu Turtle Tagging project
- Milestone for Dugong and Turtle project

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TSRA project staff and Project Officers pictured with Djawa Yunupingu, Director of Dhimurru Rangers. Photo by Moses

Torres Strait Regional Authority & NAILSMA Dugong and Turtle Project

ISSUE 7

JULY—SEPT 2008



Dugong and Turtle Project wins Banksia Award



L-R: Joe Morrison, Patrick White, Peter Garrett, Kevin George, Kenneth Bedford, Damien Pracey and Rod Kennett.

The NAILSMA Dugong and Marine Turtle Project has won the Indigenous Category of the National Banksia Environmental Foundation Awards!

The award was presented to NAILSMA Executive Officer Joe Morrison at the Awards ceremony on Friday night in Melbourne by Environment Minister, the Hon. Peter Garrett.

Accompanying Joe at the ceremony was the NAILSMA delegation: Senior Bardi-Jawi Ranger Kevin George, Dhimurru Ranger Patrick White, li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Ranger Damien Pracey, TSRA Alternate Deputy Chairperson and Torres Strait Island Regional Council Deputy Mayor Kenny Bedford and Rod Kennett Project Coordinator.

They all looked too deadly in black tie dinner suits.

Kenny Bedford was nominated to represent the Torres Strait as part of the NAILSMA delegation because of his previous experience as the Erub Dugong and Turtle Project Officer.

The Torres Strait component of the Dugong and Turtle Project focuses on developing community-based management plans for eight Torres Strait Island communities.

The project was also runner-up in the People's Choice award which is also a great endorsement of the project and shows the enormous number of supporters it has across Australia.

In accepting the award, Joe acknowledged the enormous amount of work done by Traditional Owners that made the NAILSMA project possible, and the importance of the award in acknowledging the wise stewardship of nationally and internationally significant ecosystems by Indigenous Land and Sea Managers across northern Australia.

Minister Garrett issued a press release and he said "These Indigenous people are the front-line managers of the north Australian coast."

This award is more than just acknowledgement of our Project, it is acknowledgement for all Indigenous Rangers in the North.

Major Milestone for Dugong and Turtle Project



Goemulgau Traditional Owners from Mabuiaig attending a community meeting. Endorsement for the Mabuiaig Plan was reached at the meeting. Photo by Lachlan Sutherland.

“Traditional Owners see themselves and continued culturally appropriate hunting as central to the success of this process”



Community meeting at Poruma. Iama Project Officer, Charles David, seeking support for Iama plan. Photo by Lachlan Sutherland.

On 25 August a major milestone for the Dugong and Turtle Project was achieved. At a meeting at Wug (St. Pauls community, Moa Island), the Wugalgal Elders endorsed their Dugong and Turtle Management Plan. A primary focus for the Torres Strait component of the project is the development of community based dugong and marine turtle management plans.

The planning process, involving eight islands has been underway for almost two and a half years. Through the employment of Traditional Owners on each of the participating islands, the project has been able to develop eight endorsed management plans.



Michael Morris from Masig securing a turtle at Mer in December 2007. A satellite tracker is to be attached. Photo by Lachlan Sutherland.

The eight plans will seek formal endorsement by the Government through the Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA). This is planned for early next year when the PZJA will have its next meeting.

The plans are currently accompanying the Working on Country (WOC) application

that has been lodged by the TSRA Land and Sea Management Unit (LSMU) on behalf of the eight communities. The WOC application is to secure funding to implement a Ranger program across the communities. A primary task of the Rangers will be the implementation of the plans and various other tasks such as managing land and sea-based resources.

The Boigu Island community was first to endorse their plan, followed by Mabuiaig, Mer, Iama, Badu, Erub, Kaiwalagal and Wugalgal. Developing draft plans and getting them to a stage where they were endorsed by communities and Government has been a major task for all involved, especially the Project Officers and the eight communities.

The LSMU, through their Regional Investment Strategy (RIS), have secured ongoing funding to roll out the Dugong and Turtle Project in the remaining Torres Strait communities. These will include the communities of Dauan, Saibai, Kubin, Warraber, Poruma, Masig, Ugar and possibly the Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) of Cape York.

For the Project Officers in the eight communities the planning phase of the project has been accomplished. Work and monitoring plans have been developed to see them through to the end of December.



Participants at a Guda Maluiligal meeting held in 2007 at Saibai Island. Iama, Mabuiaig, Boigu, Dauan and Saibai Islands were represented. Photo Lachlan Sutherland.

Project Officers have identified monitoring as an important task in their management plans, including surveys of turtle nesting beaches, dugong and turtle foraging areas, ghost net, seagrass beds and turtle nest predation.

During October, Project Officers will have the opportunity to attend a workshop being held by James Cook University in collaboration with the LSMU. The workshop will discuss results from the Dugong Aerial Surveys from previous years and it will be an opportunity to discuss how this data can be used in the management of dugongs.

So far the Traditional Owner knowledge of dugong herd distribution has been supported by the aerial survey data.

Project Officers will also have the opportunity to attend a final turtle nesting and tagging project at Dowar near Mer in late November and at Maizab Kaur (Bramble Cay) in early December.

Torres Strait to host International Guests

During November 2008 the Torres Strait will host a visit by the Comcaac or Seri of Mexico for a cultural exchange. They have been invited here by a Torres Strait delegation that attended the 28th International Sea Turtle Symposium in Loreto, Mexico in January.



Comcaac getting ready to performing traditional dances at Loreto, Mexico. Photos by Frank Loban.

During their visit to Loreto the Australian delegation were invited to visit one of several sacred sites belonging to the Comcaac. It was here that they saw some ancient rock paintings which included a picture of a turtle.

When the Comcaac come to Australia they will first visit Arnhem land in the Northern Territory to catch up with the Dhimurru Rangers and Djawa Yunupingu. Djawa is the Direc-

tor for the Rangers and was part of the Australian delegation to Mexico.

The Comcaac will come to the Torres Strait from 4-10 November to have a look at the country, experience the culture and see how Torres Strait Islanders interact with turtles and their environment.

It is planned that their visit will include a feasting and traditional dancing and singing on Waibene at a venue that is yet to be decided. Their visit will also include a trip to an outer island.

For more information contact Frank Loban or Kenny Bedford.



Comcaac performing traditional dances at Loreto Mexico. Photos by Frank Loban.



The Australian delegation and the Comcaac exchanging gifts at a local Loreto restaurant. Photo by Frank Loban.

The Comcaac are indigenous to the Baja Peninsula in eastern Mexico and have cultural practices and rituals involving marine turtles. About twenty years ago the Comcaac ate the Leatherback and Kemp's Ridley species of marine turtles, but due to depleting stocks decided to completely stop eating them.

This was a major decision because of the cultural and social significance turtles have in their culture and daily life. Since then ceremonies have been developed around the cultural and social significance of the species.

Project Officers present at 10th Annual GARMA Festival

From the 6-11 of August, TSRA Project Officers attended the 10th Annual GARMA festival held at Nhumunbuy, Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. This year's festival focused on Indigenous Knowledge: Caring for Culture and Country.



Torres Strait delegation pose with other Rangers groups affiliated with NAILSMA. Photo by Moses Wailu.

Presenters included Terrence Whap from Mabuiag, Charles David from Iama, Pearson Wigness from Ngurupai and Moses Wailu from Mer. The festival was also an opportunity for Project Officers to attend several presentations and work-

shops relevant to Indigenous management of land and sea resources. A number of international guests, Australian actors, senior Indigenous and non-Indigenous Land and Sea Managers, musician and politicians were present at the festival.

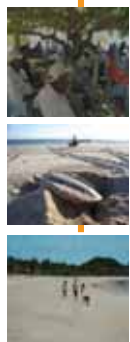
The Project Officers were able to liaise with several stakeholders affiliated with NAILSMA, including with the Dhimurru Rangers, Bardi Jawi Rangers and several other Ranger groups.



Moses Wailu presenting at festival. Photo by Lachlan Sutherland.



Ramingining Dancers at GARMA. Photo by Moses Wailu.





Wharf at Erub Island.
Photo by Lachlan
Sutherland.

*“My Father is
Erubian and
Meriam and my
Mother is of the
Waanyi tribe in
Northwest
Queensland and
Northern
Territory”*



Eddie Sailor (on left)
participating at the
Stakeholder
Consultation meeting
in May 2008. Photo by
Lachlan Sutherland.

Erub Project Officer Profile and Update - Eddie Sailor

Maiem, my name is Eddie Sailor and I am an Erubian and descended from the Samsep tribe on Erub Island, which is one of the inhabited eastern islands in the Torres Strait. I reside on Erub and I am employed as the Project Officer for our Erubam le Dugong and Turtle Management Area.

I am of both Aboriginal and Erubam le Meriam Torres Strait Islander descent.

My Father is Erubian and Meriam and my mother is of the Waanyi tribe in Northwest Queensland and the Northern Territory. I became involved in the Erubam le dugong and turtle management plan through ‘good-timing’. The previous Project Officer, Kenny Bedford, resigned from the position because he was successful in his election bid for Councilor of Erub.

Our Erubam le Dugong and Turtle Management Plan has been in the making for about two years. Previous Project Officers and community members put an enormous amount of work into the plan right up until its endorsement in July 2008.

Before becoming the Project Officer for Erub I was employed with Qld Health in the Torres Strait & NPA district. I had various positions including Client Services Officer and Human Resource Manager. Since taking up this position I’ve enjoyed being involved with the challenges of implementing our Erubam le Management Plan and Ranger Programs to sustain

our dugong and turtle populations for future uses.



Eddie Sailor at Darwin.
Photo by Eddie Sailor.

I have received a lot of support from previous Project Officers, Frank Loban, and Lachlan Sutherland at the LSMU in TSRA on Thursday Island.

Erubam le’s main aim is to manage our turtle & dugong populations according to our cultural protocols and beliefs so that there will be plenty of dugong and turtle for our future generations to harvest and share culturally. On Erub, our hunting custom and practices of not over harvesting our turtle populations has not changed as our elders have taught us the right way to hunt and harvest for personal use.

We understand this because dugong and turtle is not only a delicacy for us to consume, it is also a major part of our history, culture, tradition and they are spiritual and totemic tribe symbols. In order to endorse our Dugong and Turtle Management Plan there have been various meetings and discussions on Erub and we have formed our own

Management Plan Steering Committee which consists of 17 community members.

I recently returned from a community visit on Mer Island to discuss the shared management of our neighbouring areas. Erub and Mer Island descendants are closely related through blood marital ties and have always had customary “good-pasin” the knowledge of our shared marine environment and marine life from the past has not changed and is still accepted today. However we do understand the importance for western societies to include borders to outline our shared management areas and the roles and responsibilities involved.

At present I am in the process of initiating a few programs to be implemented on Erub to support the Erubam le management of our turtle and dugong populations. These include conducting monitoring and recording of our turtle nesting sites, ghost nets, habitat and foraging sites.

I would like to get our Erub Tagai State School and Erub community members involved, so, I will be having discussions with the Erub Tagai State School, James Cook University, Community Members & others to organize a ‘**Satellite Tracking Program**’ to monitor the various turtle movements and a ‘**Beach Watch**’ program where the school

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Tudu (Warrior Island) Tagging Project - A Big Success

lama Project Officer, Charles David and his community hosted turtle tagging training on Tudu (Warrior Island) from 28 July to 1 August 2008.

The program was a collaboration between the lama community, James Cook University (JCU) and the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA). Along with Charles, Project Officers Ishmael Gibuma from Boigu, Rangers Daniel Soki and Bertrim Pearson from Hammond Island, TSRA Project Liaison Officer Frank Loban and lama community members Mark David, Jeffery David, Francis Filewood, Satrick Baluz as well as Charlie Hankin from Mabuiag and Yauko Wigness from St. Pauls community participated in the one week event.



Turtles caught on the first day waiting to be measured, tagged and laparoscopy to be performed. Photo from Frank Loban.

Dr Mark Hamann from JCU was on hand to provide expert training to the participants. Project Officers were involved in tagging, taking genetic samples, measuring and conducting laparoscopy of foraging turtles mainly at Wapa maza (Warrior Reef) and Tidiu maza (Dungeness Reef). In general three species (types) of turtles were being

caught: green, hawksbill and loggerhead turtles.



Project participants performing laparoscopy on a turtle. Photo from Frank Loban.

Each day consisted of having breakfast, doing a briefing of where we were going, then going to the spot and catching turtles. The first day all turtles were caught and brought back to Tudu so that Dr Hamann could demonstrate and teach how to tag, collect genetic samples, measure and conduct laparoscopy with turtles correctly. About twenty turtles were caught on the first day.

Overall, a large number of turtles were caught including 5 lugared (loggerhead), 26 unuwa (hawksbill) and 74 waru (green) turtles.

The sex of the turtles is determined by using visual inspection but also through the use of laparoscope surgery for smaller immature turtles. The sex ratio of unuwa was three female to one male and for waru twelve female to one male.

During the third day a loggerhead turtle was caught that had already been tagged. Through contacting the relevant people, Dr Hamann determined that the turtle was tagged in 2006 in Bundaberg where it was

nesting at the time. This turtle traveled over 2000km to reach Wapa maza (Warrior Reef).

The training was concluded with a BBQ at lama with participants flying home the following day. On behalf of all the participants, the TSRA's Dugong and Turtle Project team would like to thank the Traditional Owners of Tudu and lama for their support and particularly thank Charles for his hard work in setting up the event.



Daniel Soki, Hammond Island Ranger, measuring a turtle. Photo by Frank Loban.

Dr Hamann, Charles David and LSMU are planning for a 2009 turtle foraging survey at Wapa and Tidiu maza.



Tudu at lunchtime. Photo by Frank Loban.



Charles, Francis and Yauko catching turtles. Photo by Frank Loban.



The boys on the last night at Tudu for a group photo. Photo by Frank Loban.

Dugong Aerial Survey Mapping Results - JCU



Dugong aerial survey team ready to depart from Ngurupai (Horn Island) Airport.

Aerial surveys for dugongs conducted since the mid 1980s have provided long-term information on the distribution and abundance of dugongs in the Torres Strait region.

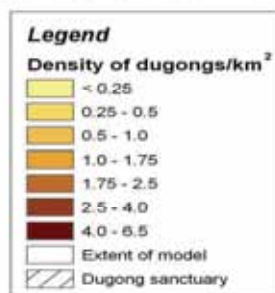
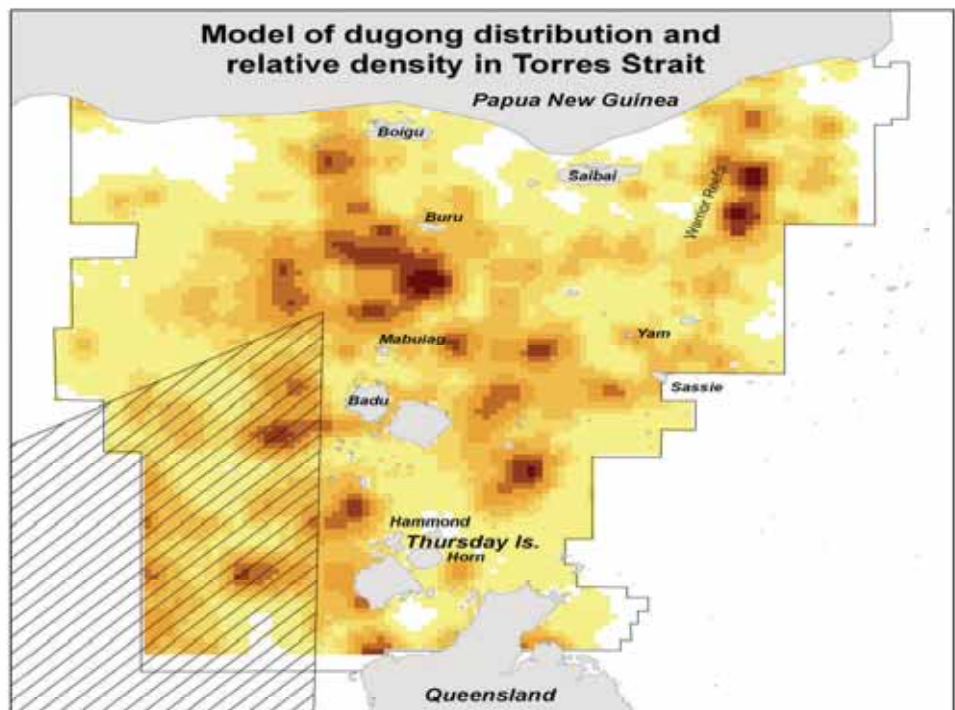
Helene Marsh and Alana Gretch of James Cook University (JCU) conducted a project last year to use the information collected from six dugong aerial surveys spanning 19 years to make a map of dugong distribution and relative density in the Torres Strait.

The map below is the outcome of this work and shows the results of the six

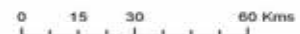
surveys. The darker brown colour shows places where dugong were regularly seen or were seen in large numbers during the surveys. The lighter browns and yellow show areas where dugong were either not seen during some years or where the numbers counted were only small. The white areas indicate that no dugongs were seen. Also shown on the map is the location of the dugong sanctuary. This sanctuary was established many years ago as a place where no dugong hunting is allowed and is a place for dugong to breed and feed.

The results show the highest density of dugong were found between Buru and Mabuiag and along Wapa maza (Warrior Reef) north of Moon Passage. Some areas had a relative density of between 4 to 6 dugong per square kilometre.

The results have been compared to similar studies along the eastern Queensland coastline and show that Torres Strait provides the largest place (habitat) for dugong in Queensland.



Model of dugong distribution and relative density in Torres Strait based on the dugong sightings from aerial surveys conducted in 1987, 1991, 1996, 2001, and 2005.



Stephen Ambar working with JCU during the 2006 dugong aerial surveys.

Lachlan Sutherland moving on to Adelaide

It has been almost three years since I arrived in the Torres Strait to start working for the TSRA Land and Sea Management Unit on the Dugong and Turtle Project. Sadly my time has come to move on and I will be moving to Adelaide with my wife Sam to be closer to our families.



Lachy tagging at Dowar in 2007.

I have had an amazing time working on this project and have learnt a lot about this place. I have had the opportunity to work with some amazing people, particularly the Island Project Officers involved in the project. It has also been great working with Frankie Loban. Frank recently applied as my replacement and was successful in getting the posi-

tion. This is a great result for land and sea management in Torres Strait. LSMU will now start to recruit Frank's replacement.

I am proud to say that the project has been driven by Traditional Owners and this is mostly down to the great work of our Project Officers. There are many opportunities available to the communities involved in the project to doing more Ranger business. Leaders like Moses Wailu at Mer are showing their passion in *looking after place*, involving their own people in projects to look after their important cultural icons. Others, like Charles David, having sought funding from the government to start his own community's research projects.

With this enthusiasm and drive from the community level Torres Strait is on the right track to developing a solid Ranger Program. I want to



Map reading training at Muyarpui (Wongai Beach) with Kaurareg Rangers.

wish all our Project Officers the best of luck in progressing all these things.

I have been able to see things in different ways by living and working here. I have been lucky to travel with Traditional Owners around country and learnt to look at things through different eyes.

I want to keep in touch with the countrymen I have been working with. Contact me at: lachysutherland@hotmail.com

Koeyma esso / Auesou
Hopefully a small yawo

"I have been able to see things in different ways by living and working here. I have been lucky to travel with Traditional Owners around country and learnt to look at things through different eyes."

Dugong Aerial Survey Mapping Results - JCU continued

Alana Gretch visited the Torres Strait communities involved in the Dugong and Turtle Project in February this year with Stephen Ambar. During this trip project officers and community members were trained in the use of GPS and GIS (Geographical Information System). GIS is what Alana used to make the maps of dugong distribution and abundance.

Traditional hunters from some islands have supported the results of dugong herd locations that appear in the map produced by the dugong aerial surveys.

This important work is a tool that can be used by Torres Strait communities to better manage their dugong herds. The map also shows the importance of area closures such

as the **dugong sanctuary**. If effectively patrolled it will be a place where dugong populations can be conserved and continue to support healthy Torres Strait Island communities.

The topic of area closures and dugong aerial survey results will be discussed at a workshop being held on Thursday Island from 14 to 16 October.



Dugong spotting.



The Torres Strait Regional Authority, Land & Sea Management Unit (LSMU) is coordinating the NAILSMA Dugong and Turtle Project in Torres Strait.

**Torres Strait Regional Authority
Land & Sea Management Unit**

Dugong and Turtle Project Newsletter

PO Box 261

Thursday Island

Phone: 07 4069 2947

Fax: 07 4069 2967

E-mail: frank.loban@tsra.gov.au

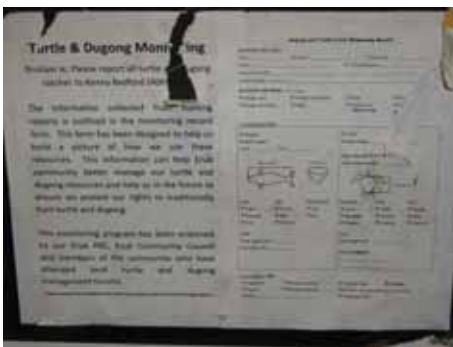
The LSMU coordinates the delivery of regional and local level land and sea management initiatives, and supports communities to access additional financial and technical support and information about sustainable management of their environments.

The Unit operates out of the Four Winds Building above the Gab Titui Cultural Centre on Thursday Island. For more information about the Unit contact the Manager, Damian Miley on 4069 2957.

Visit our website www.tsra.gov.au

The TSRA Land and Sea Management Unit wishes to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Kaiwalagal region, the Kaurareg people, on whose land we are writing and working from and to the Elders from throughout the Torres Strait.

Erub Project Officer Profile and Update —Eddie Sailor (continued from page 4)



Turtle catch-monitoring form pictured outside of Erub IBIS. Photo by Lachlan Sutherland.



Picture of Erub (Darnley Island). Photo courtesy of Lachlan Sutherland.

and community members can get together and clean up our beaches. Rubbish can float back out to sea and harm our turtle populations if swallowed or they may get tangled up in nets.

I am looking forward to what the future holds with the implementation of the Erubam le dugong and turtle management plan so we can assist in sustaining our turtle and dugong populations effectively and culturally appropriate.

If you require more information on the Erubam le Turtle and Dugong Management Plan please feel free to contact me at the Erub Island Council Office on Ph: (07) 4069 4001, Fax: (07) 4069 4000 or email: eddie.sailor@batchelor.edu.au.

Au Essau.



Exposed cliff faces at Maizab Kaur (Bramble Cay). Photo by Kenny Bedford.



Picture of Erub from the South-east side. Photo by Lachlan Sutherland.