

# North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance

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## Press Release

### Indigenous Sea Rangers Return from Mexico

A week-long international celebration of Indigenous cultural practices and management of marine turtle concluded last weekend in Mexico, but the experience gained by four Indigenous land and sea managers from the Torres Strait and North-East Arnhem Land will last a lifetime.

The small seaside town of Loreto, on the Mexican Baja California Peninsula, hosted this year's Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation. Over 1000 scientists, conservationists and Indigenous land and sea managers from 60 nations converged on the town to explore the theme, "Native Oceans".

The delegation from Australia was sent to Mexico through a partnership between the North Australian Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA), the Torres Strait Regional Authority, Dhimurru Land Management Aboriginal Corporation, James Cook University and the United States organisation, Ocean Revolution. The delegate's attendance was made possible through travel funding provided by James Cook University and The Christensen Fund.

NAILSMA's Executive Officer, Mr Joe Morrison said the exchange linked Indigenous people from Australia's northern coastal regions with the Seri Indians of Mexico and facilitated the exchange of both cultural and technical information of marine turtle species.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority's (TSRA) Chairperson Mr Toshie Kris, said he was pleased that three representatives from the Torres Strait, including the TSRA's Dugong and Marine Turtle Project Liaison Officer and JCU Masters student Mr Frank Loban, participated in the international event.

"Such opportunities are invaluable and with the marine turtle playing a critical role in the Torres Strait's culture and way of life, it is important that our people learn how to sustainably manage this importance species," said Mr Kris.

Mr Loban said the opportunity to travel to Mexico for the Symposium was an extremely important learning experience.

"The highlight was the coming together of Indigenous people from across the world, sharing ideas and knowledge about turtle conservation and why it is significant to our lifestyles and livelihoods.

"Indigenous people from places like Mexico and Venezuela have been involved in turtle conservation for a long time and we can learn from their experiences," he said.

Mr Loban explained that the management of Turtle and Dugong by Indigenous people was critical.

"Turtles are species that are harvested by Indigenous peoples for subsistence, medicinal and cultural purposes, so it is important that the primary custodians using the resource are involved in conserving it.

"We don't want to be talking to our children about turtles from a book, we want to make sure we can continue harvesting and managing them and that future generations will get a chance to see a real, live turtle", said Mr Loban.

A major aspect of the Dugong and Marine Turtle Project, which is driven by Traditional Owners, is to build networks amongst Saltwater People that are linked to governments and the scientific community.

The exchange extends this network internationally and will be reciprocated next year when the Seri people travel to Australia for the 2009 Symposium to be held in Brisbane.

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#### Photograph:

[Indigenous land and sea managers from the Torres Strait present Seri Indian elders with a framed Dhari](#) (1500 pixels x 1000 pixels).  
(L-R) Efrain Estrella, Stephen Amber (Hammond Island Ranger, Torres Strait), Alfredo Lopez, Frank Loban (NAILSMA Dugong and Marine Turtle Project Officer, Torres Strait Regional Authority) and Amalia Astorga.