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SATELLITE TRACKING PROVIDES INSIGHTS INTO FLATBACK TURTLE MOVEMENTS

Rangers from the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Land and Sea Management Unit have started tracking flatback turtles by satellite in collaboration with researchers from James Cook University (JCU).

The TSRA Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu, described the tracking as an important collaborative project given the animal's 'vulnerable' status under the Australian Government's Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

"At the beginning of March, Rangers from Badu, Mabuiag and Boigu and researchers attached satellite tracking tags to five female Flatback turtles as they completed nesting on Warul Kawa.

"The plan is to track them as they migrate back to their feeding areas.

"The team has also set up remote time lapse cameras on the island to record the number of turtles using the beach."

Mr Elu said three of the turtles have started their migrations with two having swum over 400km.

"The remaining two are still in the western Torres Strait, presumably to lay another clutch of eggs."

Mr Elu said the research team also found black rats on Warul Kawa, an Indigenous Protected Area, probably from foreign vessels.

"Because these rats eat turtle eggs and hatchlings, an eradication project has begun with support from the Traditional Owners.

"We are confident the problem was found early enough to prevent significant impact on the turtles."

Funding for the project has been supported by TSRA and the Australian Government's National Environmental Research Program (NERP).

The Torres Strait turtle tracks can be followed on the web at:

http://www.seaturtle.org/tracking/?project_id=820



Caption: TSRA Land and Sea Senior Badu Ranger, Frank Nona , prepares a flatback turtle for the tracking project. (High resolution image available).

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