

## Media Release No. 666

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### RAINE ISLAND RECOVERY PROJECT SHOWING POSITIVE RESULTS FOR TORRES STRAIT TURTLES

The northern Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait green turtle population is the largest in the world and Raine Island is the population's largest nesting site.

It is estimated that 90% of all northern Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait green turtles nest at Raine Island, with nightly nesting turtle counts exceeding 10,000 during big breeding seasons.

The TSRA Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu, said the results of years of tagging and genetic studies show that many of the mature female green turtles that nest at Raine Island forage in the waters of the Torres Strait, which supports large, healthy and abundant sea grass meadows.

Despite the high numbers of nesting female green turtles at Raine Island, the rookery has been producing low numbers of hatchlings for around three decades, which may result in a drastic reduction in the green turtle population in the coming years," Mr Elu said.

"The reason for the low hatchling numbers is still under investigation. One factor being considered is whether changes to the nesting beach profile and the resulting inundation of nests during peak tide events is responsible for high mortality of eggs in low lying nests. As well as inundation, other causes such as diseases, toxins and/or bacteria may be the cause of hatching failure."

"There are also large numbers of nesting female green turtle deaths at Raine Island as a result of cliff falls and entrapment; last nesting season, there were estimated to be around 1,500 mortalities."

The Queensland Government's Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP) is leading the Raine Island Recovery Project. This project aims to undertake adaptive management actions to reduce adult green turtle mortalities and improve hatchling success at the rookery. The TSRA has financially supported trials at the site, and has supported Traditional Owners from the Torres Strait to engage with the project.

"The recovery project has completed a sand redistribution trial of the rookery's nesting beach to improve the number of successful clutches laid, the installation of fencing along cliff edges to prevent nesting female turtle deaths from cliff falls, the establishment of fenced experimental plots to assist in the identification of causes of incubating egg deaths, the installation of cameras and data loggers, and the establishment of storage facilities to improve project delivery and outcomes," Mr Elu said.

"The project has delivered positive results, with increased nesting success, hatchling production and reduced cliff fall mortalities, especially in areas where fencing is present."

“The TSRA has supported the Raine Island Recovery Project and over the past year has been increasing its collaboration with the DEHP, implementing the same monitoring methods at Maizub Kaur and Dauar Island, the largest green turtle rookeries in the Torres Strait.

This enables outcomes to be compared between rookeries and provides greater insight into the northern Great Barrier Reef green turtle population and its status,” Mr Elu said.

The outcomes of this vital project will be communicated to Torres Strait communities with assistance from the TSRA to support Traditional Owners in sustainably managing the northern GBR green turtle population that inhabits the Torres Strait.

**ENDS**

**TSRA Media Contact – Bruce Nelson telephone 0423 403 449**



**Caption:** One of the many female green turtles returning to nest at Raine Island (Image: Tristan Simpson, TSRA)



**Caption:** A busy night for nesting on Raine Island (image: Tristan Simpson, TSRA)



**Caption:** A Raine Island Green turtle hatchling makes its way down to the water's edge on sunrise (Image: Tristan Simpson, TSRA)