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Monitoring of important turtle rookeries in the Torres Strait

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) has finished surveying Green Turtle nesting and hatchlings for the season on Torres Strait Islands with full findings due to be released in April 2015.

The TSRA's Land and Sea Management Unit team recently returned from field trips to Dauar and Maizab Kaur (Bramble Cay) where they focused on marine turtle hatchling monitoring.

The TSRA Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu, said this was the first year the TSRA has used the same monitoring methods that are used on Raine Island – the largest rookery in the northern Great Barrier Reef.

“The latest trips followed nesting surveys carried out in November and December 2014, and completed the 2014-2015 green turtle nesting season,” Mr Elu said.

“The 80 to 90 per cent hatching success coupled with the high numbers of hatchlings indicated that the rookery at Dauar is healthy for Green Turtles.”

Mr Elu said hatchling outcomes on Maizab Kaur, however, were not as healthy as that of Dauar.

“Nesting success at Maizab Kaur did not improve over the nesting season, averaging only 30 per cent throughout the season,” Mr Elu said.

“These outcomes were due to the island being very dynamic in the sense that the shape of the cay changes during the monsoonal winds.

“It was very apparent that the sand was still dry in February, which didn't help nesting turtles to successfully dig chambers and lay eggs.”

Mr Elu thanked the LSMU staff and rangers, scientists and the volunteers for their hard work and Traditional Owners of both Dauar and Maizab Kaur for allowing them to work on these remote islands.

“Whilst at Maizab Kaur and Dauar, rangers and volunteers also conducted a bird survey, the deployment and retrieval of a water quality sampler, and rubbish clean up,” Mr Elu said.

“The LSMU Rangers and staff continue to build on their skills for turtle nesting and hatchling monitoring as well as general land and sea conservation.”

The outcomes of the Maizab Kaur and Dauar green turtle nesting season will be compared with the outcomes of other Queensland rookeries before the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection produces a final nesting season report.

The combined outcomes of each Queensland turtle nesting location will assist TSRA LSMU to assess the health of the rookeries and the results will be shared with the Torres Strait communities.

The full report is due to be available at www.tsra.gov.au in April 2015.

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Caption: Green turtle nesting at Dauar (Image: Tristan Simpson, TSRA)



Caption: TSRA Rangers, staff and Traditional Owners tagging and measuring nesting green turtles is contributing to a National monitoring program of the Green turtle population (Image: Tristan Simpson, TSRA)