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TORRES STRAIT TURTLES ON THE WORLD STAGE

The Torres Strait's approach to Indigenous engagement in sea turtle management has been showcased at the Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation in San Diego, United States.

The Dugong and Turtle Project is an initiative of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) and is funded by the Australian Government's Caring for Country program.

The project focuses on traditional owners taking care of culturally significant species of dugong and turtle.

The TSRA's Environmental Management Program presented on the theme, "*Engaging Indigenous people in research – A Torres Strait example*" at the Symposium in San Diego, California.

The Torres Strait is home to foraging green turtles that are part of the largest nesting population in the world.

TSRA Chairperson, Mr Toshie Kris said turtles and dugongs are of enormous importance to Torres Strait Islanders, both as a food source and as part of their cultural identity, yet sea turtles are being driven to extinction elsewhere in the world.

"Sustainable management of the region's turtles has therefore been a priority environmental issue for the TSRA.

"We are very pleased that international recognition is being received for the excellent cooperative efforts that have gone into improving research and turtle management in the region.

"We now have community-based Turtle and Dugong Management Plans developed with and endorsed by Traditional Owners from 15 Torres Strait communities," Mr Kris said.

"Traditional Owners are now regularly engaged in marine turtle and dugong research and monitoring activities in the region.

"This has allowed for the exchange of traditional knowledge with contemporary turtle and dugong conservation research."

A key component to the success of the Dugong and Turtle Project so far has been the establishment of the Torres Strait Ranger Program.

"Indigenous rangers in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area communities are the next generation of turtle researchers and managers," said Mr Kris.

“TSRA is proud of this outcome and wants to share what we’ve learned with the world.”

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TSRA Media Contact – Susan Bryce telephone (07) 4069 0700.

Photo: Mr Ron Fujii, TSRA Natural Resource Management Officer at the Symposium.



*A high resolution photo is available from the TSRA