

## Media Release **No. 490**

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### **FERAL ANIMAL ERADICATION PROTECTS NESTING MER ISLAND TURTLES**

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) believes a feral animal control program conducted on an Eastern Group island to protect nesting turtles could provide the blueprint for similar control programs on other islands.

The TSRA Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu, said Mer Island was a significant green turtle rookery but feral dogs and cats had in recent years been using the rookery as a food source.

“Apart from their cultural significance the turtles are an important food source and a lot of effort has been put into conservation over the years.

“Feral animals have been killing adult turtles, digging up their nests and destroying eggs, and possibly killing turtle hatchlings.

“Attacks have increased in recent years due to a rise in feral dog numbers, particularly during the turtle nesting and hatchling season peak from mid-November to mid-March.”

Mr Elu said the community raised concerns about turtle losses with the TSRA Land and Sea Management Unit (LSMU) last year.

“After close consultation with the Prescribed Body Corporate, the Torres Strait Island Regional Council, Community Enterprises Australia, the wider community and school an eradication program was the obvious solution.

“LSMU staff worked with the community explaining how the program would run by house to house door knocking, public notices and the circulation of brochures and maps showing areas to be targeted with baiting and traps.”

Mr Elu said community involvement and support was the key to the campaign with increased public awareness ensuring domestic dogs and cats were not placed at risk during the eradication.

“The project started with a dog health program that offered people the chance to have pets de-sexed and unwanted animals euthanised by a contract veterinarian.

“The week long control program eradicated 70 feral dogs and 18 cats using trapping, baiting and shooting under close supervision by the contract vet.”

Mr Elu said the program was very successful with the numbers of recorded attacks on turtles drastically reduced.

“The key now to keeping numbers down will be to keep the community engaged in closely monitoring the feral dog population and working closely with our partner agencies to maintain the twice a year dog health program visits by a vet.”



Caption: A sign and a trap used during the Mer Island feral animal control project to protect turtles.

**ENDS**

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