

## THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN MARINE TURTLE PROJECT: 1996/97

Beachwork programs of the Western Australian Marine Turtle Project able to maintained for the 1996/97 nesting season were again limited by restriction of operational funding that could be secured in the first instance, with execution of considered viable work programs further disrupted for the Pilbara locations by the active tropical cyclone season this year.

Loss once again after only one year resumption of Commonwealth core funding via ANCA for the main project operations was a particularly severe blow. The good news was that BHP Iron Ore joined the project as a supporter for the flatback turtle work at Mundabullangana, and the Japan Wildlife Centre, Tokyo, made an additional donation to assist with the North West Cape and Muiron Islands work in association with their wildlife film project.

Additional assistance from CALM Gascoyne and Exmouth Districts, and the Pilbara Region, plus supplementary support from CALM SI Division meant that work programs for most established study sites could be considered. Continued Commonwealth World Heritage Management Program funding supported the Dirk Hartog Island loggerhead turtle work. Apache Energy also funded a work experience program which allowed the hawksbill turtle work at Varanus Island to be revived. Unfortunately, the Lacepede Islands work program could not be attempted - this was the major loss for 1996/97.

Tag and release and remigrant observation data for the 1996/97 season beach work programs are summarized below. Apart from the spectacular result from the Dirk Hartog Island work, the results for other sites generally reflect the interaction of the restrictions already noted above, and the coincident low nesting abundance of green turtles at the Pilbara study sites this summer, in contrast with 1995/96. Barrow Island volunteer work was also limited in consequence of restructuring of WAPET's oilfield operations.

### New turtles tagged and released from WA locations - season 1996/97

Dirk Hartog I beaches			807 loggerheads (only species here)	
NW Cape beaches	175 greens*	2 hawksbills	14 loggerheads	0 flatbacks
S Muiron I beaches	38 greens	0 hawksbills	36 loggerheads	0 flatbacks
Barrow Island	10 greens	0 hawksbills	0 loggerheads	0 flatbacks
Rosemary Island	4 greens	97 hawksbills	0 loggerheads	3 flatbacks
Varanus Island flatbacks <sup>@</sup>	3 greens <sup>@</sup>	7 hawksbills <sup>@</sup>	0 loggerheads <sup>@</sup>	17
Mundabullangana flatbacks				30
(only species here)				

[\* 1 green first tagged NW Cape seen later at Muirons; <sup>@</sup> includes other Lowendal Is]

### Remigrant turtle observations - 1st time, season 1996/97

Dirk Hartog I beaches			74 loggerheads	
NW Cape beaches	46 greens	0 hawksbills	2 loggerheads	0 flatbacks
S Muiron I beaches	5 greens	0 hawksbills	24 loggerheads	0 flatbacks
Barrow I beaches	4 greens	0 hawksbills	0 loggerheads	0 flatbacks

Rosemary I beaches	0 greens	30 hawksbills	0 loggerheads	1 flatbacks
Varanus I beaches	0 greens <sup>@</sup>	7 hawksbills <sup>@</sup>	0 loggerheads	2 flatbacks <sup>@</sup>
Mundabullangana beaches				6 flatbacks

[<sup>@</sup> includes other Lowendal Is]

#### **Remigrant - 2nd time, season 1996/97**

Dirk Hartog I beaches			2 loggerheads	
NW Cape beaches	0 greens	0 hawksbills	2 loggerheads	
S Muiron I beaches	0 greens	0 hawksbills	4 loggerheads	
Barrow I beaches	0 greens	0 hawksbills		0 flatbacks
Rosemary I beaches	0 greens	1 hawksbills		0 flatbacks
Varanus I beaches	0 greens <sup>@</sup>	2 hawksbills <sup>@</sup>		1 flatbacks <sup>@</sup>
Mundabullangana beaches		Nil		

[<sup>@</sup> includes other Lowendal Is]

I hope that this additional information is of interest to you as a project participant, and helps you to further appreciate the scope of other work undertaken for the Western Australian Marine Turtle Project in 1996/97. It is regretted that revival of our former more comprehensive project newsletter is not possible just now.

The Western Australian Marine Turtle Project has experienced particularly hard times over the past three seasons. The work that has been sustained from 1994/95 through 1996/97 is substantially due to the efforts of the willing volunteer participants, aided further by the additional operational support provided by the various external private and corporate sponsors.

Prospects for the 1997/98 season are still largely uncertain at present, although the Dirk Hartog Island work program is already funded, and some of the Pilbara Region work has partial support in hand. Search for and securing of necessary funding for the remainder of the field program for 1997/98 is crucial over the next 6-8 weeks. Success in this venture will permit us to sustain a viable work program for the project.

Your past contribution to this work is much appreciated, and your future participation welcome if you so wish, provided we are successful in the present quest. Early notification of your availability for 1997/98 work if desired would help in planning should we be able to proceed with the project. Thank you for your interest and help.