

## **FLATBACK TURTLE CONSERVATION PRIORITIES: THE INTERSECTION OF BIOLOGY, PRESSURES, ECONOMICS, STAKEHOLDERS AND POLITICS**

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Over the past decade, the Australian endemic flatback turtle (*Natator depressus*) has had an increased national conservation profile despite its data deficient IUCN status. Driven by its overlapping nesting distribution with major industrial projects in Western Australia (WA) and Queensland, flatback turtles have received increased political focus. This has resulted in a rapidly growing research effort funded through Environmental Impact Assessments, industry compliance monitoring and environmental offsets or similar. The Northwest Shelf Flatback Turtle Conservation Program (NWSFTCP) is an additional undertaking (offset) from the Gorgon Gas Project in WA operated by the WA Government. The funding spans 30 + 30 years with the objective to increase the conservation of flatback turtles through research and monitoring, education and intervention. The program, still in the establishment phase, has put in place strategic plans outlining priority actions including: foundational systems (e.g. financial and data systems), research projects to fill key knowledge gaps, long term monitoring programs and educational strategies to effect behavioural change. With feral animal predation, artificial light and climate change listed as major pressures, we will touch on a range of projects that address these issues as well as projects that address fundamental knowledge gaps such as aging, migration, population genetics and foraging. We will present the opportunities and challenges of planning, implementing and maintaining a program with a projected 60+ year life and the complexities of balancing program objectives within changing political environments. This includes periodic planning phases within an adaptive management framework. Guaranteed long term funding allows for long-term planning, ensures program stability, encourages long-term stakeholder partnerships and results in overflow of conservation benefits to broader marine issues including other turtle species.

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