



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Ranger Finds Rare Sea Turtle Nests in NT**

In January this year Garig Gunak Barlu National Park Cobourg Peninsula had a visit from eleven leatherback sea turtles, the rarest sea turtle in Australia and one of the most endangered globally.

Parks and Wildlife Senior District Ranger at Cobourg, Peter Fitzgerald, said he found the tracks in late January while removing discarded fishing nets and marine rubbish from a remote beach, during a general beach check.

“The tracks looked like vehicle or tractor tracks up the beach,” Mr Fitzgerald said.

“Although I did not see the turtles, the tracks are huge, measuring two metres in width, so we were sure they were from a leatherback.

“Nesting by leatherbacks has been reported at Cobourg irregularly over the past 10 years, but I have never seen one, so we are all really excited about the find.

“We have not been able to go back and check on the hatchlings, because the roads have been inaccessible due to flooding, but hope to help protect and monitor the area next year.”

Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA) marine scientist, Dr Scott Whiting said Cobourg Leatherbacks are extremely important for Australia and the region.

“In Australia, the Bundaberg coast used to support small but regular numbers of nesting leatherback turtles, but they have not been seen there for 10 years,” Dr Whiting said.

“Leatherback populations in the region have declined in recent years, this is thought to be caused by high numbers killed in long-line fisheries throughout the Pacific.

“Major declines in nesting numbers have also been seen in the major nesting rookeries of Malaysia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

“Threats to the nests at Cobourg come mainly from feral pigs and dogs that dig up and eat the eggs.

“Our Parks and Wildlife rangers are making an extra effort to ensure that this beach is free of feral predators such as pigs and dogs.

Dr Whiting said when mature, the Leatherback Sea Turtle can weight between 500 and 900 kg, measure over 1.5 m in shell length and span over 2 m between the tips of the front flippers.

“They live mainly in the open ocean and feed almost exclusively on jellyfish,” Dr Whiting said.

"The eggs take between 7 and 9 weeks to hatch but unfortunately the recent rain at Cobourg has stopped access to the beach to check if the eggs hatched.

This information will be incorporated into NRETA's NT-wide, Sea Turtle Conservation program which gathers information on a range of turtle species.

Garig Gunak Barlu National Park protects rare species, including the Dugong and six marine turtles (Loggerhead, Hawksbill, Olive Ridley, Leatherback and Flatback Turtles).

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**Media Note \_ For more information contact Dr Scott Whiting on 8920 9221.  
Photo attached, must be credited to Matthew Godfrey.**

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