



Media Release:

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Marine Debris Cleanup Shows Fewer Net Discards

A recent marine debris survey at Groote Eylandt has shown a marked reduction in the number of fishing nets washed up on the island.

The annual survey, undertaken jointly by Anindilyakwa Land Council Rangers and scientists from the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA) Marine Biodiversity Group, was carried out at Malkayibirra Beach near Umbakumba on Groote Eylandt.

Anindilyakwa Land Council Ranger Coordinator Simon Hartley said local schoolchildren from Umbakumba and Angurugu assisted with the collection and sorting of the debris.

Mr Hartley said the 2007 survey was the seventh marine debris survey undertaken at Malkayibirra Beach.

"The 2007 survey undertaken on August 28 and 29 turned up only a small fraction of the number of beach wash nets found on previous surveys," Mr Hartley said

"In 2006 we collected nearly a thousand kilograms of nets, or about 69 per cent of the total weight of marine debris collected from a 6km stretch of beach.

"This year we found only about 3.5 kg, or less than one per cent of the total weight of marine debris from the same stretch of beach.

"The remaining weight of other marine debris in 2007, about 434kg was almost identical to 2006, when we collected 433kg," he said.

NRETA marine debris scientist Shane Penny said the much smaller quantities of fishing nets washed up on Groote Eylandt was a positive sign.

"It may be related to reduced levels of illegal fishing in the Arafura Sea and Gulf of Carpentaria since 2006, and to better practices by Australian prawn fishing boats," he said. "Other marine debris, however, remains at about the same level.

"Based on the labels and other identifying information the main source of this debris appears to be from foreign vessels, with the majority of it manufactured in Indonesia, China and Singapore.

"Marine debris is a major threat to marine wildlife in northern waters and is linked to the mortality of turtles, dugongs, crocodiles, sharks, seabirds, and fish, so we are doing as much as we can to prevent our native wildlife and fish stocks falling victim to marine debris."

The marine debris monitoring program in the Northern Territory has received funding from the Natural Heritage Trust and continues to be a community-based collaboration between Indigenous people, community groups, sea rangers and scientists.

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Media Note – For more information contact Linda Hughes, Anindilyakwa Land Council on 8987 4040 or Karen Edyvane, NRETA Marine Biodiversity Group, on 8920 9261

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