

**Media Release:**

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## **Northern Territory Globally Significant for Marine Turtles**

A new report documenting the distribution and status of marine turtle nesting in the Territory has confirmed the Northern Territory is of international significance for marine turtle nesting.

The Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) principal scientist, Professor Karen Edyvane said the extensive study and report by NRETAS' wildlife officer Ray Chatto was a product of outstanding professional commitment and a truly remarkable achievement.

"This report is the fifth in a series of comprehensive reports written by Mr Chatto, with the first four reports detailing – for the first time - the distribution and status of seabirds, shorebirds and waderbirds across the Territory," Professor Edyvane said.

"Large-scale wildlife studies such as these involve lengthy periods of research, and an incredible number of field hours dedicated to aerial and ground surveys in order to provide this essential baseline data for conservation and management.

"We have a vast coastline and wide range of coastal and marine ecosystems in the Top End and fortunately much of it remains in pristine condition, so this baseline knowledge is really valuable both locally and internationally."

Research for the *NT Turtle Report* spans over 14 years, with more than 7,000 records mainly collected between 1990 and 2004, recording marine turtle nesting sites across the entire coast of the Northern Territory, including nearby islands.

Mr Chatto said the high density areas for marine turtle nesting was mainly recorded off the coast on islands with sandy beaches, with only a few high density sites found on the mainland where egg predation was generally much higher.

"Six of the seven species of marine turtles found in the world are found in Territory waters, with all six of the species listed as threatened nationally and five as threatened internationally," Mr Chatto said.

"Flatback turtles were clearly the most widespread nesting species, with the Northern Territory populations comprising the majority of Australia's nesting Flatback turtle population. The Green turtle nesting was also abundant – with beaches south of Cape Arnhem and on south east Groote Eylandt combining to represent one of the top three areas for Green turtle nesting in Australia.

"While the Leatherback turtle was confirmed at only one site - on the Cobourg Peninsula – this is also the only known regular nesting population of Leatherback turtles in Australia.

"Similarly, the Northern Territory has the densest nesting of Olive Ridley turtles in Australia, especially in the Tiwi and Wessel Islands regions, while the Hawksbill turtle nesting sites off north east Arnhem Land and islands off Groote Eylandt are likely to be one of the top three important nesting sites for Hawksbill turtles in the world."

Mr Chatto said many of the nesting areas for marine turtles along the Territory coast can now be considered of national and international importance.

“With many of these sites on Aboriginal land the ongoing collection and collation of these nesting records in partnership with Indigenous communities will provide vital information for the monitoring and management of marine turtles across the Territory,” Mr Chatto said.

“The next step in the process is to formally protect turtles and their nesting habitat in the Northern Territory and to establish scientific monitoring programs in partnership with Indigenous communities and Indigenous ranger groups as well as develop cooperative management programs and plans for these species and selected areas.

“These conservation programs need to link in with the development of marine park planning and other State and Federal Government regional conservation plans – as well as Indigenous ranger programs and sea country planning in remote coastal communities.”

To view the full report go to <http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/publications/wildlife/science/2008.html>.

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**Media Note – for more information contact Karen Edyvane - 8920 9261 or 0401 115 786**

**Images –**

- 1. Baby Flatback turtle at Casuarina Coastal Reserve\_sand**
- 2. Baby Flatback turtle at Casuarina Coastal Reserve\_water**

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