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TITLE: A new species of turtle-headed sea Snake (Emydocephalus: Elapidae) endemic to Western Australia

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ABSTRACT:

We describe a new species of turtle-headed sea snake *Emydocephalus orarius* sp. nov. (Elapidae) from Western Australia's Coral Coast, Pilbara and Kimberley regions. Phylogenetic analysis of mitochondrial markers places the new species as the sister lineage to the two currently recognised species in *Emydocephalus*: *E. annulatus* from the Timor Sea reefs and Coral Sea, and *E. ijimae* from the Ryukyu Islands. Analysis of nuclear SNP data from the new species and *E. annulatus* from Australia and New Caledonia provides additional independent evidence of their evolutionary distinctiveness. The new taxon is usually morphologically diagnosable from its congeners using a combination of scalation and colour pattern characters, and appears to reach greater total lengths (>1 m in the new species versus typically ~80 cm in *E. annulatus*/*E. ijimae*). The new species is known largely from soft-bottomed trawl grounds, unlike *E. annulatus* and *E. ijimae* which usually inhabit coral reefs. The discovery of this new species brings the number of sea snake species endemic to Western Australia to six.

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