Progress Report CF 2011-118

North West Shelf Flatback Turtle Conservation Program strategic plan

Marine Science

Project Core Team

Supervising Scientist	Scott Whiting
Data Custodian	
Site Custodian	

Project status as of July 11, 2016, 1:33 p.m.

Approved and active

Document endorsements and approvals as of July 11, 2016, 1:33 p.m.

Project Team	granted
Program Leader	granted
Directorate	granted

North West Shelf Flatback Turtle Conservation Program strategic plan

S Whiting, Tucker

Context

The Strategic plan for the North West Shelf Flatback Turtle Conservation Program (NWSFTCP), one of four environmental additional undertakings for the Gorgon Gas project at Barrow Island, is currently going through Departmental approval after being presented at several NWSFTCP Advisory Committee meetings. The plan was based on a risk assessment developed within the Department's Marine Science Program and published in Conservation Science Western Australia vol. 9: 227–237.

The purpose of the NWSFTCP is to increase the conservation and protection of the Northwest Shelf flatback turtle population through: surveying, monitoring and research; reducing interference to key breeding and feeding locations; and establishing information and education programs. The Marine Science Program coordinates the planning and implementation of works required for the NWSFTCP in addition to coordinating general research and monitoring of marine turtles in Western Australia. The NWSFTCP has a range of governance arrangements that include an Advisory Committee and a Panel of Experts.

Aims

- Develop a conservation plan for marine turtles in Western Australian as an overarching document to guide marine turtle conservation activities and to provide context for the NWSFTCP.
- Develop a Strategic Plan for the NWSFTCP to outline the scientific, management and communication activities over the next five years in the context of long-term goals.
- Establish the governance arrangements for the NWSFTCP.

Progress

In the past year a range of projects outlined in the draft Strategic Conservation Plan progressed or were initiated and included:

- Draft management plan completed
- Science projects continued or were developed in past year inlcuded:
  - Synergies with WAMSI turtle project;
  - Several PhD students working on thermal biology of flatbacks;
  - PhD Student started in light impacts on turtles;
  - PhD student started on marine turtle health and disease;
  - PhD student started in fox impacts on flatback turtles;
  - preliminary data collected on fox impact on clutches of eggs at Mundabullangana Station;
  - nesting sites were mapped across the Kimberley as part of the WAMSI Turtle project turtle;
  - transmitters attached to over 20 flatback turtles; and
  - published proceedings of the 2nd Australian and 2nd Western Australia Symposia.
- Coordination of the NWSFTCP
  - Advisory Committee met twice and reviewed budgets and reports.
  - Draft Strategic Communications Plan developed

Management implications

The NWSFTCP Strategic Plan will map out the foundations of the program that establish a robust program of works within a strategic long-term framework. The NWSFTCP fund provides an opportunity to fill key gaps in knowledge,

establish a long-term robust monitoring program, and deliver management outcomes for flatback turtles whilst more generally providing the framework for conservation and management of all marine turtles in Western Australia.

Already completed or current studies have delivered knowledge relevant to management, including:

- ground breaking information on the ability of turtles to adapt to climate change;
- first assessment of fox impacts on Mundabullanga beaches;
- first remote tracking studies of hatchlings in-water to assess light impacts; and
- collection of over 12 neonate turtles that will assist in filling knowledge gaps in critical lifecycle stage.

Future directions

Future studies and activities include:

- stable isotope study
- investigate potential for in-water studies of flatback turtles
- critical habitat identification
- long-term monitoring plan development
- Information management plan development
- Communications plan finalised
- Submissions to Marine Park Coordinators describing the status of marine turtles and the pressures that impact them, as part of Western Australian Marine Monitoring Program reporting.
- Strategic Plan for the NWSFTCP finalised and published.