



## Cape York Peninsula Development Association Inc.

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### *Media Release*

**4 April 2007**

### **Three Cape York Turtle Species at Risk of Local Extinction by 2030**

Three species of sea turtle that nest on Western Cape York Peninsula could face regional extinction by the year 2030, according to the findings of a 2006 Turtle Nest Predation Monitoring Program conducted by the Cape York Peninsula Development Association Inc (CYPDA).

The program found three species at risk including the olive ridley, hawksbill and flat back sea turtles.

The CYPDA coordinated monitoring by indigenous rangers of turtle nest predation through the Natural Heritage Trust funded program.

This followed a 2006 cull of feral pigs from Aurukun to Injinoo on Cape York Peninsula and Prince of Wales Island in Torres Strait, by the Cape York Weeds and Feral Animal Program.

The turtle nest predation monitoring found that despite the cull, predation at four sites on Cape York remained at 65-70 per cent, with up to 90 per cent of predation caused by feral pigs.

Turtle Project Manager and CYPDA Natural Resource Management Coordinator Brian Benham said that the data collected in 2006 gave a clear indication of the immediate risk to turtle populations on Cape York's western coastline.

"Because of the urgency of the situation, we are working hand in hand with communities, scientists and all levels of government to formulate an effective response," Mr Benham said.

"The current level of feral pig predation on sea turtle nesting sites matches findings of a 2001 joint Department of Primary Industries and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) survey which found 100% of new sea turtle eggs were being taken by pigs."

QPWS turtle researcher Ian Bell said that if no action was taken to stop the predation sea turtle nesting populations on the western Cape would cease to exist within several decades.

"This is because sea turtles return by instinct to the beaches where they hatch and do not colonise new nesting areas."

"Worldwide, the priority for turtle conservation is looking after sea turtle nesting sites," Mr Bell said.

"Because the nests on Cape York are being devastated by feral pig predation, this region must be a conservation priority."

The 2006 Turtle Nest Predation Monitoring Project Report delivered to Queensland and Australian Governments recommended a combination of large scale culling, removal of targeted animals, and nest protection to reduce the risk of the turtles disappearing forever from Cape York beaches.

Brian Benham said that although the 2006 feral pig cull was very useful in terms of reducing overall populations of pigs on Cape York Peninsula, it was less effective against individual 'smart pigs.'

"These 'educated' animals have learned to avoid helicopters, vehicles, baits, humans and lights by hiding in scrub on coastal dunes," Mr Benham said.

"They can cause massive damage to populations, destroying dozens of nests every night."





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CYPDA is applying for Natural Heritage Trust Funding, for a Turtle Nest Protection Project to conduct a second feral pig cull, and employ indigenous rangers to continue monitoring and provide protection for nesting sites in 2007.

An announcement on the funding is expected in early May.

**Media Conference:** **5 April, 2007 - 11.00 am** - Brian Benham Turtle Project Manager and CYPDA Natural Resource Management Coordinator and Peter Harper, Senior Ranger Napranum at Holloways Beach (meet at the stinger nets). Please note Peter is non-indigenous.

**Interviews:** Ian Bell, QPWS Turtle Researcher is available for telephone interview today.

**Vision:** Picture of pig disturbing a turtle nest, picture of Rangers at work. Brian Benham and Peter Harper on beach discussing project. GPS location training.

**Media contact:** MaryBeth Gundrum, CYPDA Communications Manager on 0429 385 567 to arrange for interviews and vision. International media +61 429 385 567

