
MEDIA RELEASE

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PNG Treaty Communities Embrace Sea Turtle and Dugong Conservation

Communities in Western Province, Papua New Guinea have welcomed a new program to raise awareness of the issue of over-hunting of sea turtles and dugongs.

The Program recently commenced with a workshop in Daru, PNG where Treaty community representatives voiced their concern over falling sea turtle and dugong numbers and strongly supported an Awareness Program that will educate community members to reduce impacts.

The Program will be delivered by Sea Turtle Foundation with the support of the PNG Dept of Environment and Conservation. It will educate children about sea turtle and dugong life-cycles and make adults aware of sustainable hunting practices.

"Treaty community representatives are deeply concerned over this issue" said David Roe of Sea Turtle Foundation. "At the workshop they told us they want to ensure sea turtle and dugong populations are safe and will always be found in Torres Strait waters".

"We will now develop activities and resources and take that message into Treaty villages and schools", continued Mr Roe. "By raising awareness of the issues and showing ways to reduce impacts we are turning a corner in sea turtle and dugong conservation in the region. The aim is to bring these animals back to safe numbers".

Sea turtles and dugongs are listed as threatened species due to a wide range of human impacts. They are caught in fishing gear, they are hit by boats, they swallow marine debris and they lose their habitats to coastal developments.

"The people are seeing fewer sea turtles and dugongs every year", said Sisa Kimia, Treaty Village Chairman. "All the Treaty communities have agreed to work together to reduce take from hunting. This is important for us, our children and our culture".

Western Province Treaty people can hunt in Australia's Torres Strait waters under the Torres Strait Treaty Act 1984 in recognition of this being their traditional hunting and fishing sea country. Sea turtle and dugong conservation work is well advanced in the Australian side of the Torres Strait.

"In the Torres Strait there is a Ranger Program and management plans to care for these animals", continued Mr Roe. "But sea turtles and dugongs are migratory so for this work to be effective similar work must also take place in PNG. We are very pleased to now be starting that work with the full support of all 13 PNG Treaty communities."

The Program has core funding from the Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility (MTSRF) - a component of the Dept of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts - and has the support of the Dept of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Sea Turtle Foundation is a non-profit, non-government organisation based in Townsville, QLD. Businesses interested in supporting the Program should contact David Roe 07 4721 2699, david.roe@seaturtlefoundation.org. To learn more about Sea Turtle Foundation's program of research, education and action go to www.seaturtlefoundation.org

Media enquiries:

Images and further information is available from David Roe, Sea Turtle Foundation
+61 (0)7 4721 2699 / 0431 259 129 / david.roe@seaturtlefoundation.org

About Sea Turtle Foundation

Sea Turtle Foundation is a non-profit, non-government group working to protect and conserve sea turtles through research, education, awareness and action. Learn more at www.seaturtlefoundation.org.