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MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HELP THE SEA TURTLES ON YOUR BEACH

The nesting season for sea turtles has just begun and in the next few months thousands of turtles will come ashore on Queensland beaches to dig their nests and lay their eggs. This prehistoric ritual has worked for sea turtles for over 100,000 years and ensured their continued existence. Now this ritual is under threat from many sources, most of them created by humans.

Sea Turtle Foundation is distributing a brochure called 'Sea Turtles and Lights' in the first week of November to beachfront residents along the Queensland coast where sea turtle nesting occurs. The brochure highlights actions local residents can take to minimise disturbance and help in the protection of sea turtles.

Bright artificial lights on beaches at night can confuse turtle hatchlings and they will crawl towards the light rather than the ocean. The hatchlings may then get run over on roads, eaten by predators or overheat in the day.

"We need to involve local residents in the protection of sea turtles to ensure their future in our oceans", said Gitte Kragh, Project Manager for Sea Turtle Foundation. She continued, "We are working with many local groups including Burdekin Dry Tropics Natural Resource Management, Mackay and District Turtlewatch Association, Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation and Whitsunday Catchment Landcare to get local communities involved and make residents aware of the impacts of beachfront lighting."

But residents are not the only targets of the campaign - Councils will also be approached as much of the lighting which disturbs turtles comes from street and car park lighting. "We need to ensure the safety of humans and turtles alike," Gitte said.

Actions *you* can take to safeguard the hatchlings on your beachfront include keeping outside lights to a minimum, planting vegetation between your lights and the beach, fitting curtains or blinds to your beach front windows, and collecting hatchlings you find crawling away from the beach and releasing them back on the beach away from artificial lights.

"Six of the seven species of sea turtles in the world are found along the Queensland coasts and we have an obligation to protect these iconic creatures. They are all listed as vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered and we need the local communities to rally to their aid so future generations can experience these ancient mariners", states Dr Andrea Phillott, sea turtle biologist from James Cook University.

You can also help by advising Sea Turtle Foundation when you see turtle tracks on the beach through the Turtle Track Monitoring Program. You can SMS 0431 259 129 or email tracks@seaturtlefoundation.org with the date, time and exact location of your sightings. This data will then be displayed on the Sea Turtle Foundation website, www.seaturtlefoundation.org, so residents can see where nesting occurs.

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