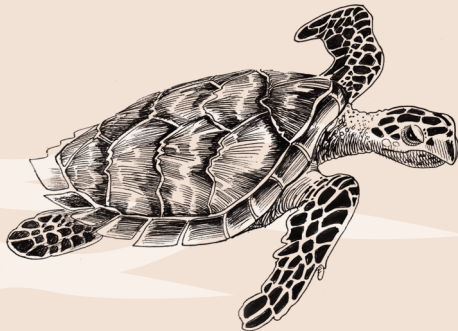


## LOCATION



The waters of the Fraser Coast contain a vast array of marine habitats and coastal landscapes that form a transition zone between tropical and temperate waters. The changing water temperature drives dynamic life cycles and influences how coral, fish, mangrove and seagrass species are distributed. Seagrass meadows, mangroves, rocky shores, reefs, sandy beaches, bays, sheltered channels, rivers, creeks and estuaries host a wealth of wildlife including whales, turtles, dugong, grey nurse sharks, fish, corals and birds.

The Butchulla and Kabi Kabi First Nation people have a connection with the waters of the Fraser Coast, including the Great Sandy Strait. Today these Traditional Owners continue to practise their native title rights and interests and have an ongoing spiritual connection to land and sea Country and the protection of their Cultural landscape along with custodial responsibilities to pass on traditional knowledge to future generations.



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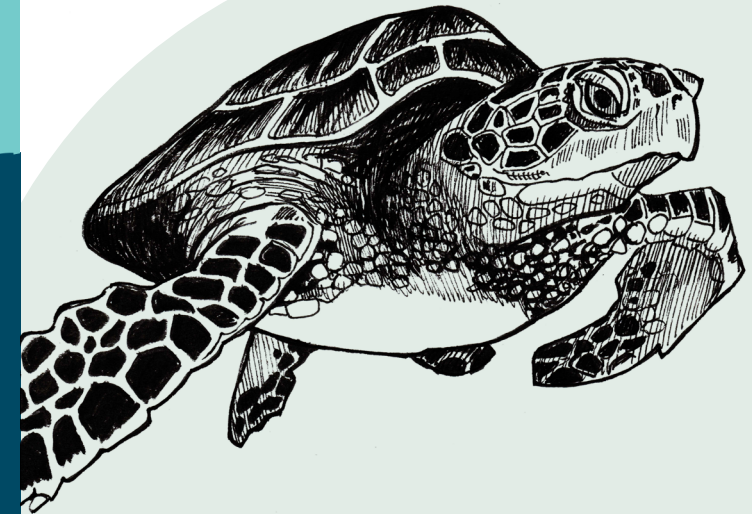
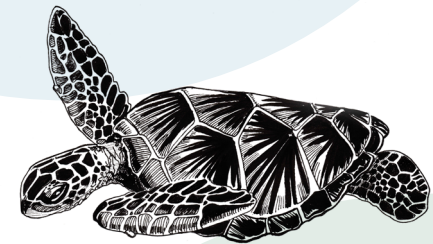
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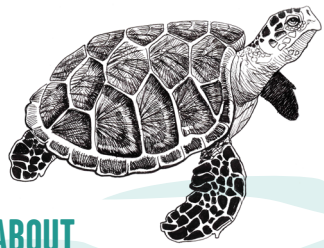
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# MARINE TURTLES

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# Marine Turtles

## ABOUT

This turtley awesome reptile has been around for over 130 million years! Marine turtles use their lungs to breathe just like us.

Some species can hold their breathe for up to 7 hours, slowing their heartrate to a single beat every nine minutes to conserve oxygen. They come in a range of colours including olive-green, gray, yellow, greenish-brown, reddish-brown or black. Marine turtles can range in size from 70cm to 125cm in length and are characterized by a long, streamlined shell. The shell on their back is called a 'carapace', while the shell on their underside is called a 'plastron'. Diets vary greatly among marine turtles and can include seagrass, algae, sponges, sea jellies, crustaceans, gastropods, sea cucumbers and soft corals. They have special glands in their eyes which excrete the salt they ingest when feeding. This gives the impression the turtle is crying, but really, they are performing a very important bodily function.

Of the seven species of marine turtle, six are found within Australian waters. Four of these can be seen within the waters of the Fraser Coast, including:

### 1 **LOGGERHEAD TURTLE** (*Caretta caretta*)

The Loggerhead turtle has a dark brown heart-shaped carapace (shell) between 80-110cm in length. Top of the head is dark brown, becoming pale on the sides with irregular darker blotches and white, cream or yellowish below. Hatchlings are rich reddish-brown above, dark blackish-brown below. It weighs between 70-170kg and is carnivorous.

**STATUS:** Endangered

### 2 **GREEN TURTLE** (*Chelonia mydas*)

Green turtles are smooth olive-green (variegated with brown, reddish-brown and black) high-domed carapace (shell) between 88-125cm in length. It weighs between 113-204kg. Hatchlings are shiny black above and white below, with white margins around the carapace (shell) and flippers. While immature Green turtles are carnivorous, adults feed mostly on seagrasses and algae.

**STATUS:** Vulnerable

### 3 **HAWKSBILL TURTLE** (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)

The Hawksbill turtle is olive-green or brown above, richly variegated with reddish-brown, dark brown and black. The scales of the head and face are often dark with pale contrasting sutures (lines between the scales) and it is cream to yellowish below (the plastron). They are up to 82cm in length and weigh around 50kg. Hawksbill turtles are omnivorous surviving on sponges, seagrasses, algae, soft corals and shellfish.

**STATUS:** Vulnerable

### 4 **OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLE** (*Lepidochelys olivacea*)

Olive ridleys are grey or olive-grey above, usually without any conspicuous markings and whitish below. Their carapace (shell) is broad and heart-shaped, usually with six or more costal scales. They can grow to a total length of 1.5 metres and weigh up to 40kg. Their hatchlings are blackish above, dark brown below. They are carnivorous surviving on shellfish and small crabs.

**STATUS:** Endangered

## HABITAT

Marine turtles can live in many different habitats, including coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves in tropical regions. Adults of most species are found in shallow, coastal waters, bays, lagoons, and estuaries. Six of the world's seven marine turtle species are resident in or visit the Great Sandy Marine Park. Areas of the marine park are important for marine turtle courtship and mating. While marine turtles spend most of their life in the sea, once sexually mature (between 7-40 years old) the females come ashore during the breeding season to lay their eggs on sandy beaches.

### Did You Know?

*A sea turtle cannot retract its limbs, head or neck under its shell like a land turtle. The shell adaptations allow for rapid swimming.*

## THREATS

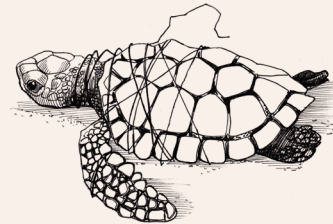
There are many threats to the survival and sustainability of marine turtle populations resulting from both natural impacts and human activities including vessel strikes, nest predators, plastics and light pollution, coastal erosion and climate change. Climate change is having a devastating impact on turtles. It is estimated that by 2070 marine turtles may be unable to breed due to increasing temperatures resulting in the production of only female hatchlings. Nesting habitat is being affected by rising sea levels, coastal erosion and changes to food supply. Light pollution is also having a negative impact on our marine turtles. Artificial light on beaches confuse nocturnal nesting marine turtles to retreat back to the ocean mistaking the light for sunrise.



Females typically lay between 50-200 round soft-shelled eggs at a time. Hatchlings emerge after 7-12 weeks, with their sex determined by the temperature of the sand. Warmer temperatures produce females, with cooler temperatures producing males. Males almost never return to land once hatched. Hatchlings use environmental cues such as currents, waves and the Earth's magnetic field to direct them to deeper waters. They then enter a phase known as 'the lost years', whereby very little is known about their movements. When they reach 5-10 years old, they join adults at coastal feeding grounds, where they remain until they reach sexual maturity. The cycle then begins again.

For hatchlings, light pollution like street and city lights can cause them to head away from the ocean and toward parking lots and city streets.

Pollution, such as plastic bags resembling sea jellies, can be digested and cause death. The race to help save this species has begun. Efforts to increase hatchling survival rates include using remote sensing, fencing, predator-bating and sniffer-dogs.



## CONSERVATION

Marine Turtle conservation and management in Queensland commenced in 1932, making it the longest in Australia's history. In 1968, Queensland became the first jurisdiction in the world to protect all marine turtle species within its borders. The Queensland Government continues to commit to turtle conservation through the Reef 2050 Plan, the Recovery Plan for Marine Turtles in Australia 2017-2027 and implementing a Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) single species action plan. All marine turtle species are protected in Australian waters, and are classified as either 'vulnerable' or 'endangered' under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act.

Maintaining healthy marine turtle populations is important for Queensland's biodiversity, cultural and social values and contributes significantly to the Queensland economy through tourism. Marine turtles play an important ecological role in the shaping and regulation of coastal marine communities by contributing to the maintenance of healthy seagrass beds and coral reefs, helping balance marine food webs and facilitating nutrient cycling.

### YOU CAN HELP TURTLES BY:

- ✓ Properly discarding fishing equipment and retrieving any you find.
- ✓ Reducing your use of chemicals around the home and disposing of them properly.
- ✓ Reducing your boat speed in shallow seagrass and coral reef areas.
- ✓ Reducing your use of plastic and dispose of it properly.
- ✓ Preventing your pets from disturbing nesting females, nests and hatchlings.

### Did You Know?

*Of every 1000 hatchlings that emerge, only one will survive long enough to reproduce. That equates to a 0.10% chance. Not very good odds!*

