

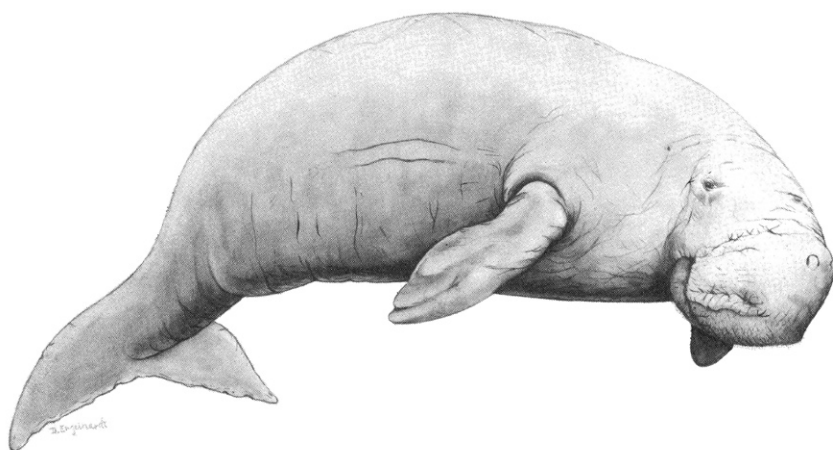


Australian Government

Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority

Protected species in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

Fact Sheet No. 13
February 2009



The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is one of the world's largest, most biologically diverse and important ecosystems. It is home to thousands of different organisms, including more than 100 protected species.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is home to:

- One of the world's most important dugong populations
- Six of the world's seven species of marine turtle, including the largest breeding aggregation of green turtles in the world (at Raine Island)
- Sea snakes, a unique but vulnerable group of animals found only in the Indo-Pacific region
- About 1.7 million seabirds from 23 species that breed on islands and cays, accounting for up to 50 per cent of the global population for some of these species
- A significant refuge for the vulnerable endemic Australian snubfin dolphin and the Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphin, as well as migratory species including the humpback whale and dwarf minke whale.

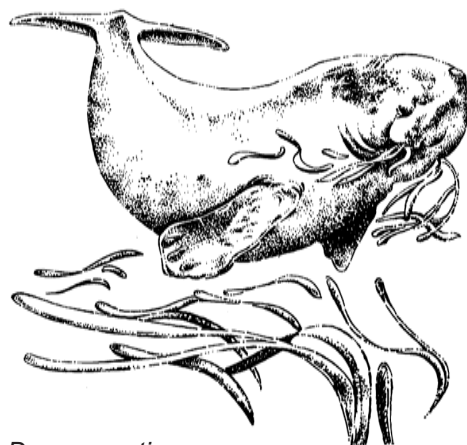
What is a protected species?

In the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, a protected species is defined as one that is protected by international, national or state laws, and/or under the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983. See www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/key_issues/conservation/natural_values for more information about these laws.

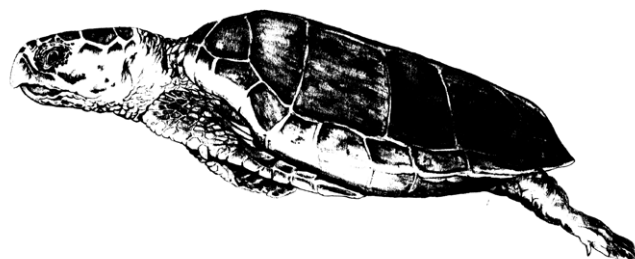
Reasons for protecting a Great Barrier Reef species include if the species is considered:

- **Threatened** – meaning its population has declined
- **Iconic** – meaning it is one of Australia's most well-known and loved animals, and thus requires special management
- **At risk** – meaning it faces pressures from human-related activities within or adjacent to the Marine Park.

Protected species need special management because of recognised threats to their populations.



Dugong eating seagrass



Loggerhead Turtle

What species are protected in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park?

- All marine mammals (whales, dolphins, dugongs and seals)
- All marine reptiles (sea turtles, sea snakes and crocodiles)
- All birds
- Some molluscs including giant clams, helmet and triton shells
- Some fish species, including:
 - All Syngnathids (seahorses, seadragons and pipefish)
 - Some shark species including grey nurse, great white and whale sharks
 - Most sawfish species
 - Maori wrasse and barramundi cod
 - Potato cod and Queensland groper – for all other Epinephelus species (cods and groupers), individual fish more than 100cm long are also protected.

Which of the Great Barrier Reef's species are the most threatened?

Dugongs and loggerhead turtles are two species under the most threat.

Dugong numbers in the Great Barrier Reef (south of Cooktown) have fallen by about 97 per cent since the early 1960s. Dugongs are listed as 'vulnerable' both internationally and within Queensland. Entanglement in fishing and shark control nets has been identified as one of the significant causes of the dugong decline.

All marine turtles are long-lived, slow growing, and late-maturing animals. Because of this, impacts upon their populations can take decades to become apparent and then to reverse. Marine turtle species face a number of threats from human activities both within the Great Barrier Reef region, and throughout their vast migration areas.

Loggerhead turtles breed in the southern Great Barrier Reef

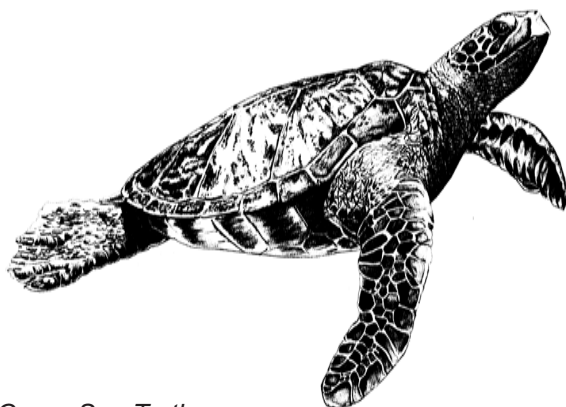
and southeast Queensland. The abundance of nesting loggerhead turtles in the Great Barrier Reef region declined by up to 90 per cent between the 1960s and early 2000s.

Incidental capture and drowning in fishing gear and predation of nests by foxes were identified as two causes of this decline. However, numbers of nesting loggerhead turtles have increased since the early 2000s. This recovery is attributed to dedicated feral animal control programs and the mandatory inclusion of turtle excluder devices (TED's) in the east coast trawl fishery in 2001.

For many other Great Barrier Reef's species, there is insufficient information to assess their population status.

What are the main threats to protected species?

Marine wildlife has always been affected by natural factors such as predators, cyclones and disease. However, over the last 150 years, a new threat has emerged – humans.



Green Sea Turtle



Hawksbill Turtle

Human-related threats have reduced the abundance and range of many marine species including dugongs and turtles. The greatest concern is that this could lead to population extinctions.

Human-related threats to protected species include:

- Habitat degradation and loss from coastal development
- Incidental catch in fishing gear, and shark control nets and drum lines at popular beaches
- Boat strike
- Marine debris ingestion and entanglement (especially plastics and lost/discarded fishing gear)
- Harvesting: commercial and Indigenous, and illegal take especially by foreign vessels
- Predation on nests by introduced predators (especially feral pigs and foxes)
- Declining water quality
- Climate change.

What is being done to reduce the risks to protected species?

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) works to conserve all species and habitats in the Marine Park by maintaining the health of the reef through zoning, managing high-use areas, and responding to climate change and declining water quality. Protected species need special management and the GBRMPA works to conserve protected species by:

- Ascertaining which species are under threat or at risk
- Identifying any threats to the survival of these species
- Developing and implementing management actions to mitigate threats
- Working with industry and management to encourage and refine sustainable fishing practices and the use of by-catch reduction devices

- Encouraging and educating Marine Park users to minimise their impact upon the Great Barrier Reef, and encouraging residents and businesses in the catchment to minimise their indirect impacts upon the Reef
- Educating and encouraging Marine Park users, and residents and businesses in the catchment, to minimise their impact upon the Great Barrier Reef.

What can I do to help the protected species of the Great Barrier Reef?

When boating, keep a lookout for protected species and go slow where they occur, adhere to regulations including approach distances.

If you see a stranded, sick, injured or dead marine mammal or reptile, please call the EPA Hotline immediately on 1300 130 372 (local call cost) to report the animal.

Please do not litter – take all your rubbish, including bait bags and fishing line, home with you.

Become involved in community-based monitoring like:

Seagrass Watch

(www.reef.crc.org.au/discover/plantsanimals/seagrass/seagrasswatch.html)

Reef Check

(www.reefcheckaustralia.org).

Volunteer with conservation organisations such as:

Queensland Parks and Wildlife

(www.epa.qld.gov.au/about_the_epa/working_at_the_epa)

Conservation Volunteers Australia

(www.conservationvolunteers.com.au)

Useful links

Protected species in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/key_issues/conservation/natural_values

Marine Turtles in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area

www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/info_services/publications/misc_pub/marine_turtles

Position Statement on the Conservation of Dugongs in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
www.gbrmpa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/21962/dugong_position_statement.pdf

Whale and Dolphin Watching Regulations

www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/key_issues/conservation/natural_values/whales_dolphins/whale_and_dolphin_watching_regulations

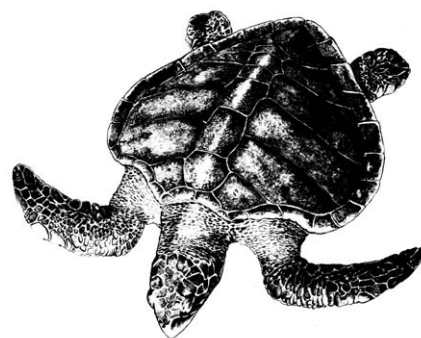
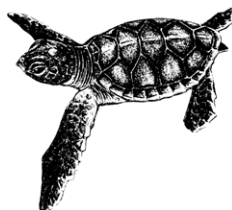
Responsible ways to experience the Marine Park >> Around Turtles

www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/key_issues/tourism/recreation/turtle_watching

See also EPA's marine biodiversity webpage:

www.epa.qld.gov.au/nature_conservation/biodiversity/marine_biodiversity

To receive fast e-mail notification about each turtle, dugong, whale and dolphin stranding reported to the EPA, register for the Stranding-Announce Listserver via the GBRMPA's website:
www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/info_services/stranding_announce



Olive Ridley Turtle

For Further Information
Visit the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's website: www.gbrmpa.gov.au

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