

Flood-ravaged turtles released in Moreton Bay

December 1 2011

(PhysOrg.com) -- A University of Queensland biological researcher has led the Moreton Bay release of four turtles that suffered starvation and illness from the January floods.

Dr. Kathy Townsend from UQ's School of <u>Biological Sciences</u> usually investigates the impacts of <u>marine debris</u> on <u>sea turtles</u>, but for the better part of this year has found herself in turtle <u>emergency care</u>.

Joining forces with Underwater World and Earthwatch Australia, Dr. Townsend helped rehabilitate three <u>Green turtles</u> and a <u>Loggerhead turtle</u> that were found stranded and critically ill on North Stradbroke Island in August.

Dr. Townsend said there had been an increase in sick turtles and marine life in Moreton Bay this year.

"The Moreton Bay area was heavily impacted by the floods, which caused massive sea grass die back caused by the high sediment load. This year, we've had more animals stranded than in past years," she said.

<u>Turtle Release A Team Effort</u> from <u>The University of Queensland</u> on <u>Vimeo</u>.

"Three of the turtles we released came in starved and underweight, which is most likely related to the flooding, and not getting enough food



and weakening over the winter season.

"One of the turtles had swallowed marine debris, causing a gut impaction and making it 'float'. This means it can no longer dive for food, it has difficulties getting out of the way of boats and is more likely to be attacked by predators."

After retrieving the turtles stranded on North Stradbroke, Dr. Townsend and her team at the Moreton Bay Research Station spent 72 hours rehydrating the animals, treating any wounds and removing parasites.

The animals were then transported to Australia Zoo for veterinarian treatment, followed by long-term rehabilitation at Underwater World.

However, the rescue operation has not diminished the importance of Dr. Townsend's research on marine debris and sea turtles at UQ's Moreton Bay Research Station.

"Moreton Bay is feeling the impact of discarded rubbish, with work done by my lab indicating that the cause of death of over 30 percent of stranded sea turtles studied was due to the ingestion of marine debris, with an additional six percent due to entanglement," she said.

"This is of great concern as <u>Moreton Bay</u> is an important feeding ground for these endangered species, with the population estimated at over 20 000 individuals, a surprisingly large number considering it is on the door step of Australia's fastest growing city.

"Our objective is to better understand the risks and impact that marine debris has on marine fauna, using endangered sea turtles as indicator species."

Dr. Townsend's research has attracted the support of a large network of



local community groups, philanthropists and partners, including her key backers Earthwatch Australia and Goldring and Goodman Foundations.

For the past three years, the Earthwatch Australia has provided Dr. Townsend with financial support as well as volunteers to help out with her research projects.

Provided by University of Queensland

Citation: Flood-ravaged turtles released in Moreton Bay (2011, December 1) retrieved 17 May 2024 from <u>https://phys.org/news/2011-12-flood-ravaged-turtles-moreton-bay.html</u>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.