

# Australia probes claims turtles, dugongs butchered alive

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File illustration photo shows a dugong. Australia Friday vowed to investigate claims that turtles and the threatened dugong are being killed to feed an illegal meat trade after images of an animal being butchered alive sparked new concerns.

Australia Friday vowed to investigate claims that turtles and the threatened dugong are being killed to feed an illegal meat trade after images of an animal being butchered alive sparked new concerns.

The Queensland state government ordered the probe after indigenous hunters were seen flipping a live sea turtle onto its back and then hitting it on the head with a brick and hacking off its [flippers](#).

Footage on national broadcaster ABC also showed dugongs, or [sea cows](#), being cut up for their meat.

State environment minister Vicky Darling said the inquiry would investigate whether those shown had broken the law, which in Queensland allows native title holders to hunt the animals for personal needs only.

"I was disturbed when I saw the footage, as I expect were many other viewers," Darling said.

"We don't know if this was traditional hunting by people with native hunting rights -- that's why we need to investigate.

"If these actions weren't in accordance with the Native Title Act, then these individuals can expect the full force of the law."

The footage was recorded using a hidden camera by activists who claim that despite the protected status of [sea turtles](#) and dugongs, meat from the animals was being sold illegally.

"The export or commercial sale is very concerning and that's what we'll investigate," added Darling.

Environmental campaigner Rupert Imhoff, who spent two weeks filming in the Torres Strait in northern Queensland, said one turtle was tethered to a rope for up to three days before it was killed.

He said [indigenous people](#) routinely chased their prey in motor-powered boats before spearing them, tying the animal's tail to the boat and then dragging it while holding its head under water until it drowned.

Queensland is home to the [Great Barrier Reef](#) which is brimming with marine life, including the dugong, a plant-eating mammal which can grow up to three metres (10 feet) in length and weigh 400 kilograms (880 pounds).

The long-lived but slow-breeding dugong, along with the sea turtle, is listed as being vulnerable to extinction.

Animal rights group RSPCA said a long-term plan was needed to combat the problem of how animals were killed by indigenous hunters.

"Obviously there's alternatives now so that the animal basically dies instantly and doesn't die a prolonged death," RSPCA spokesman Michael Beatty told the ABC.

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