

Volunteer divers asked to upload manta ray snaps for science

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Manta ray. Credit: Dr Kathy Townsend, Moreton Bay Research Station.

A University of Queensland scientist is calling for volunteer divers to photograph the underside of manta rays in waters off the Western Australian coastline and upload them to Facebook as part of a research project.

The photographs will be used as data in [Project Manta](#), a research project to help track and protect two endangered species of manta ray in Australian and Indonesian waters.

School of Biomedical Sciences fish biologist Professor Mike Bennett said UQ students would be visiting fishing ports between Perth and Broome in October and November to recruit volunteers.

"Photographs taken by citizen scientists will provide us with vital information," Professor Bennett said.

"The underside of a manta ray is highly patterned and, as each one is unique, this enables us to identify individuals and to monitor their movements.

"Details obtained from observational data will be entered into our database and will provide invaluable information for our manta ray protection research project."

People interested in taking part should contact project.manta@uq.edu.au or visit Project Manta on Facebook.

The three-year [research project](#) is focused on two species of manta ray, the reef manta and giant manta, which are currently endangered by a worldwide increase in fishing activity.

Professor Bennett said the fieldwork would mostly take place in Western Australian, Northern Queensland, Northern Territory and Indonesian waters.

"We need a greater understanding of manta ray population dynamics to enable us to provide comprehensive population management and protection recommendations," Professor Bennett said.

"These are very large fish. The giant manta grows to about seven metres from wing-tip to wing-tip, and we estimate they live in excess of 25 years.

"But their reproductive output is very low. We know the female gestation period is about one year and they seem to produce only one pup every three years.

"The [manta rays](#)' ability to offset losses to their population due to fishing is therefore a real issue."

Provided by University of Queensland

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