Green Turtle - profile

**Scientific name:** *Chelonia mydas*

**Conservation status in NSW:** Vulnerable

**National conservation status:** Vulnerable

**Description**

A large sea-turtle that grows up to 1 m in length. Its heart-shaped shell is olive-green, brown and black, and the scales on the side of the face and limbs have distinctive pale edges.

**Location and habitat**

**Distribution**  
Widely distributed in tropical and sub-tropical seas.Usually found in tropical waters around Australia but also occurs in coastal waters of NSW, where it is generally seen on the north or central coast, with occasional records from the south coast.

**Habitat and ecology**

* Ocean-dwelling species spending most of its life at sea.
* Carnivorous when young but as adults they feed only on marine plant material.
* Eggs laid in holes dug in beaches throughout their range.
* Scattered nesting records along the NSW coast.

**Regional information**  
This species is found in the following catchment management authority regions.

* Hawkesbury/Nepean
* Hunter/Central Rivers
* Northern Rivers
* Southern Rivers
* Sydney Metro

**Threats**

* Green turtles need decades to reach sexual maturity. During this long period, they face many threats, both on beaches and in the ocean. There are many hazards that occur naturally, but the rapid decline of the turtle population in the Sulu Sea can be largely attributed to harmful human activities in the area.
* While in the ocean, adult green turtles have to avoid large predators such as sharks and killer whales. And even when they survive these predators and arrive after a long migration at the Turtle Islands to breed and nest, these adult turtles face still more threats. They may be caught by trawlers or long-lines, or destroyed by dynamite, before they even reach the beaches to lay eggs. The lights on the shore may scare them away and keep them from climbing up the beach. On the beach, huge logs may block their way, preventing them from finding a suitable place to dig a nest. Also, on some beaches covered with litter, they may not find room to nest.

 *A female green turtle that has finished nesting, leaving her eggs on the beach to incubate for about two months. (Stuewe, Oct. 1998)*

* It takes about two months for sea turtle eggs to hatch, and during that time the eggs are left unattended, as mother sea turtles do not protect their nests. So even if the eggs are not collected by people, their survival is still not assured because they face other threats. Monitor lizards, ghost crabs and even rats and ants can dig into the nests and devour the eggs. Once they hatch, the baby turtles, called hatchlings, must dig themselves out of the nest and make their way to the sea. While crawling on the beach toward the sea, they can be eaten by the same animals that dig into the nests, as well as by birds, dogs and cats. Inland lights disorient them, so they don't make it to the sea. Offshore, bright fishing lights attract them, drawing them to where there are concentrations of predatory fishes and fishing activities. Even just getting off the beach, across the reefs and out to sea can be a major ordeal for the hatchlings, because predatory fishes wait for them to cross the reef during their first swim.