



Bellinger River turtle mortality update: #1

Following the recent discovery of freshwater turtles found dead and dying in the Bellinger River late last month a response team has been established to attempt to determine the cause.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service and Bellinger Shire Council have established an incident management team (IMT) at the Council offices, to systematically investigate matter.

Incident Controller and NPWS Senior Wildlife Management Officer Geoff Ross one of the first tasks is to determine extent of the problem.

“Assessment teams will begin monitoring the River upstream of Thora to map exactly as possible the extent of the area where turtles have been affected”, Geoff said.

“Initially teams will undertake a visual assessment without handling turtles so as to reduce the possibility of cross-infection”, he said.

“Hygiene protocols have been developed specially for this response and are required to avoid the potential to spread any disease pathogen until more is known.

“To date just over 100 affected turtles have been found to date suffering apparent blindness leading to inability to feed and subsequent starvation.

“Results on turtles sent to Sydney for clinical and pathology analysis are expected later this week.”

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) inspected the Bellinger River at 4 key locations when the situation was first reported and water quality sampling did not identify any contamination impacting the river.

No pesticides, including organochlorines, organophosphorous and pyrethroids, or hydrocarbons were detected at any of the four sample sites.

The NPWS is working closely with council, the Taronga Zoo, Department of Primary Industries, Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and WIRES as well as local community members.

Local WIRES reptile coordinator Tom Damaschke (0427545338) can be contacted if people find further live sick turtles. To help prevent potential spread of whatever may be causing the problem people are advised report sick turtle sightings but not to enter the water, handle the turtles or try to capture any turtles in the Bellinger River.

ENDS

Images of the incident management team are here:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/48646673@N07/sets/72157648599063903/>

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