



Australians For Animals

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AUSTRALIA'S SHAME

“ All that will be left are the sounds of silence.”

These are the prophetic words of Aunty Mary, an elder with the Mandubarra people of Innisfail.

Aunty Mary, along with other Aboriginal elders, is deeply concerned by the ongoing slaughter of dugongs and turtles by many indigenous people.

The slaughter is out of control. It is neither monitored, or enforced in any way shape or form.

With no definitive information on the numbers killed, the best current research estimates suggest that the numbers of green turtles could be as high as 100,000 annually. An out of date report indicates an annual slaughter of 1,500 or more dugongs in Torres Strait alone.

Queensland has just 100 rangers according to Mark Read, Manager, Species Conservation, at the Great Barrier Marine Park Authority. Only some of those rangers are given the task of monitoring the marine environment. No figure of that number is available. But the task of monitoring Queensland's huge environment is clearly beyond the abilities of 100 rangers who have zero powers when it comes to illegal indigenous slaughter.

We know that although commercial trade in dugong and turtle meat is illegal, there's a massive trade coming from the Torres Strait to islanders living on the mainland. According to one scientist, there's 7,000 people living on the islands and more than 80,000 islanders on the mainland.

In a submission by NSW Young Lawyers Association to the Federal Government's Marine and Coastal Committee Taskforce on Dugong and Marine Turtle Populations, an elder from one of the Torres Strait islands asserts that many people hunt dugong commercially, supplying the big Torres Strait Islander communities in Cairns, Townsville and other southern cities.

According to the report, this information has been confirmed by a former resident of the Torres Strait who advised the Committee that sea meat is transported by plane to Cairns and that this is understood to include turtle and dugong meat.

On September 6th, in an ABC news report, wildlife documentary film maker, Ben Cropp reported that some Indigenous communities have resorted to selling the meat for cash.

"It is so common - the sale of turtle and dugong meat - and that has escalated the killing, probably doubled, tripled, the killing," he said.

"That is what has got to be stopped and the only way to stop that is to simply make a law that dugong and turtle meat cannot be taken out of the community.

"We know that dugong and turtle meat is sold now - you have only got to go to the airport and see the people come through with eskies.

"If you stop them they are going to say, 'sure, I brought some dugong meat down for my family' but it's rubbish - they are selling it."

In the same report, James Epong from the Mandubarra group in Far North Queensland says poachers are killing turtle and dugong meat for sale locally and overseas.

Mr Epong says the illegal sale of turtle and dugong meat is no secret, with people selling it in local pubs and it being sent overseas.

He says one man allegedly made \$80,000 last year.

"There is an overseas market - you can buy a 20 to 30 kilogram pack of dugong," he said.

"There is a black market where they are transporting the turtle and dugong meat overseas.

"Up Cairns way, some lad made \$80,000 for one year of poaching.

"Now the breeding season starts, these poachers they come along with their boats and shooting them or spearing them and just taking them."

Australians for Animals Inc. met with Federal Minister Tony



Burke's advisor on dugongs and turtles in August and requested that the Australian Federal Police investigate the trade as a matter of urgency. The response?

"We don't have any evidence." Right. As if the evidence given to the Task Force, the formal complaints to Cairns police and the fact that dugong and turtle meat is sold in Cairns pubs is not sufficient to instigate an investigation.

The truth is that the current Federal Government would rather see the dugongs and turtles go extinct than rock the Native Title boat and protect these animals.

Internationally, the dugong is listed as vulnerable and the green turtle as endangered. Dugongs are so vulnerable that scientists specializing in this animal say they will be globally extinct within 40 years unless drastic action is taken to protect them.

Did you hear that Minister Burke? His latest effort, making a \$5 million grant to train more indigenous rangers in the Torres Strait would be better spent in bringing in a

permit/licensing system which was strictly enforced as well as encouraging the prosecution of acts of cruelty. The hard cold reality is that the Native Title Act needs to be revised to ensure that Australia's wildlife is protected and that the laws which protect wildlife and the environment apply to ALL AUSTRALIANS.

IMPORTANT

EVERY SCIENTIFIC PAPER WHICH AUSTRALIANS FOR ANIMALS HAS RESEARCHED SAY THAT THE INDIGENOUS HARVEST IS UNSUSTAINABLE. MODELS PREDICT SEVERE AND IMMINENT REDUCTIONS IN DUGONG NUMBERS WITH MEDIAN TIME TO QUASI EXTINCTION WITHIN 42 YEARS. EXTINCTION PROBABILITIES ARE HIGH FOR THE EASTERN CAPE YORK PENINSULA WITH INADEQUACY OF RESERVES AND HIGH HARVESTING RATES.

PLEASE GIVE GENEROUSLY NOW



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THE CRUEL SLAUGHTER OF DUGONGS AND TURTLES IS KILLING ABORIGINAL CULTURE.

Indigenous slaughter, under the provisions of the Native Title Act, is immune from the following legislation.

Queensland's Animal Care and Protection Act 2001 (ACP Act), Queensland's Fisheries Act, Queensland's Nature Conservation Act, the Federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Protection Act, the Great

Barrier Reef Marine Park Act.

Internationally, the Federal Government, in refusing to provide adequate protection, monitoring and compliance measures, is in violation of the following international conventions. Convention on Biodiversity and the Convention of Migratory Species and potentially, the UN Law of the Sea.

The methods of killing which are being visited on defenceless animals are clear violations of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Acts of every Australian State. Queensland is the only state which exempts indigenous people from the provisions of the Act.

Hunting, fishing, cultural, social, spiritual reasons are all green lights to proceed

with slaughter. Wildlife is paying the price for Native Title. Australians for Animals has been told by impeccable sources that when the Native Title Act was on the table, pre the final decision, legal advice supported the protection of threatened and endangered wildlife over indigenous rights. In the end, indigenous rights to take wildlife prevailed.

In almost all states' national parks, indigenous people can take in firearms, kill endangered wildlife and in some instances, insist that the parks be closed for periods so that the killing can take place without visitors witnessing the slaughter.

THESE ARE THE POLITICS OF SEPARATION.

James Epong speaks of the traditional ways that turtles are killed. He says that on the night of the full moon, two elders go out in a boat with the hunter and they sing. They sing a turtle to the boat, listening for the whistle of sound as the turtle comes closer, lifting its head out of the water until finally, it is close enough to be hauled in. Then the turtle is killed instantly.

In the NSW Young Lawyers submission, they report on the evidence of a fisheries ranger in Torres Strait who claimed that many young Torres Strait Islanders are catching dugongs and turtles for sport and that large amounts of meat have been dumped in the council tip on Thursday Island. The report quotes anecdotal evidence that many younger indigenous hunters cannot be controlled by elders.

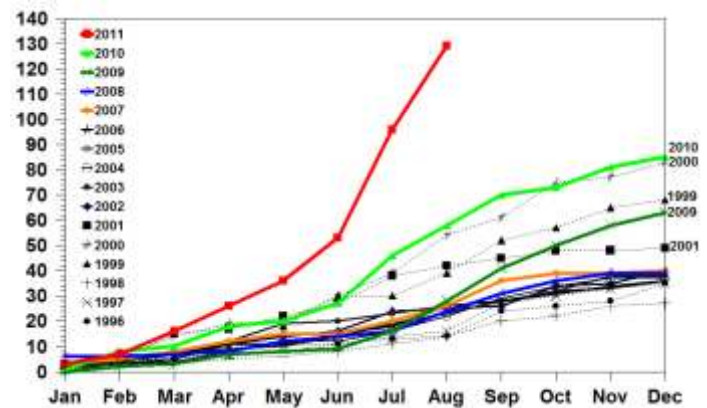
The documented reports of dreadful cruelty being inflicted on turtles and dugongs is nothing short of a national and international disgrace. These kinds of wicked acts are neither traditional nor cultural and many Aboriginal elders are broken hearted at the violence

being perpetrated on these animals.

In the courts, magistrates and judges are ruling that motor boats and modern facilities like GPS systems can be used to track the animals. There's no definitive code which makes clear what is and what is not traditional hunting.

Unfortunately, there's no humane way to kill dugongs and this should be sufficient reason to suspend all slaughter of these gentle seacows. Turtles are equally difficult to slaughter resulting in horrific cruelty.

Then there's the ecological role that dugongs and turtles play in keeping the marine environment healthy, ensuring that we have oxygen



THIS IS THE LATEST DUGONG STRANDING CHART FROM QUEENSLAND NPWS. THE FIGURES DO NOT INCLUDE ANY INDIGENOUS SLAUGHTER.

to breath and that there are rich diverse seagrass beds for fish and other marine critters to breed.

The cyclone and floods have been the last straw for the dugongs and green turtles. Unless there is a moratorium declared on any hunting, and steps taken to ensure the enforcement of the moratorium, we will see localised extinctions and the potential of long term extinction.

Queensland's LNP Party have promised that they will remove the exemption for indigenous people from the Animal Care and Protection Act. This is a huge

breakthrough and we can only hope that the Federal Government will find the guts to take a stand and make the necessary changes to the Native Title Act.

For further information, please contact Australians for Animals Inc. PO Box 414, Brunswick Heads, NSW 2483.

The charity salutes the Mandubarra people and other Aboriginal leaders who are making a stand for wildlife. We will work tirelessly with them to ensure that the real Aboriginal culture of caring for the Earth is sustained.