



Media Release:

Extinction a 'saw' point during Seaweed

Seaweed 2-8 March 2008

Many of Australia's marine and coastal species are still at risk of extinction, Marine Coastal Community Network (MCCN) said today.

MCCN is highlighting the plight of Australia's marine and coastal threatened species as part of Seaweed 2008 in conjunction with the Marine Education Society of Australasia (MESA).

The sawfish is one species threatened by line entanglement and trawler nets.

This unusual animal has a distinctive saw-like rostrum (snout) containing up to twenty pairs of teeth. The sawfish, which is actually closely related to rays and sharks, uses its rostrum to filter through the seabed searching for food. Unfortunately its unique 'saw' shape makes it easily caught in fishing nets and lines, as well as making it attractive to illegal souvenir-hunters.

Four species of sawfish are found in Australia, all listed as critically endangered internationally, however only the Freshwater sawfish is considered vulnerable in Australia, making Australia's sawfish population globally significant.

The Grey Nurse shark is another threatened species affected by accidental death in nets and fishing line. There are now less than 500 individuals left on the east coast of Australia.

MCCN and MESA provide freely available information to the general public on marine and coastal issues in an effort to educate people about threats to marine species and habitats.

National Coordinator of MCCN Fiona Mandelc says that providing information to members of the public about threatened species, ecological communities and threatening processes is the first step to conserving Australia's marine biodiversity.

"By keeping informed and being conscious of how our choices, for example in recreational activities or the seafood we eat affect marine life, we can greatly reduce the risk of harming our marine threatened species."

MESA President Angela Colliver says that reporting sightings and protecting habitat of marine threatened species is also vital to their long-term survival.

"We can all do our bit to protect threatened species by getting involved when we encounter sick, injured or dead animals and helping keep our waterways and ocean healthy for generations to come. Whether you live in a big city, small town or in the country what you do at home and at school can affect the quality of the water in your local rivers, estuaries and marine areas".

Australians can find more about threatened species, habitats and threatening processes in their area by visiting the Australian Government's Threatened Species database at www.environment.gov.au/sprat.

For more information about marine and coastal conservation and sustainability issues, visit the MCCN website at www.mccn.org.au.

More information about Seaweek 08 is available at www.mesa.edu.au/seaweek2008/default.asp.

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Images available: High definition images available of Green Turtle swimming and Freshwater Sawfish caught in net. Contact Anne Briggs at E: anne@mccn.org.au

Seaweek & MESA Background

The Marine Education Society of Australasia (MESA) is a national organisation that promotes the sustainable use of marine and coastal environments through education.

'Seaweek' is one of MESA's annual community education initiatives to develop community awareness, and participation in the protection and sustainable use of Australia's diverse coastal and marine environments. Each year a different theme is chosen for Seaweek. In 2008 Seaweek's theme is "Extinction - a Saw point" highlighting the plight of the declining sawfish.

5 Facts about Saw Fish:

- Sawfish are members of the ray family (Pristidae) and are characterised by a heavily toothed saw (rostrum) and shark like fins.
- Sawfish are long-lived, late maturing, and produce few young. These life history characteristics make sawfish populations highly susceptible to overfishing. Sawfish populations are slow to recover if overfished.
- Sawfish are threatened by human activities especially habitat modification and their incidental capture in the commercial net and recreational bait net and line fisheries.
- Sawfish have cultural significance to some Indigenous Australians.
- In Australia, our fisheries and management agencies are trying to reduce sawfish interaction through better education and awareness programs, as well as targeted enforcement of fisheries regulations and investment in monitoring and research programs.

More information on Seaweek and MESA: www.mesa.edu.au

MCCN Background:

The Marine Coastal Community Network is a national, not-for-profit network. It aims to inform, engage, and connect community interests, government and industry to facilitate positive outcomes for the conservation of marine and coastal biodiversity and ecological processes, and the ecologically sustainable use of Australia's marine and coastal environments.

There are currently over 10,000 organisations, groups and individuals who use the services of the Network, covering government agencies, industry and the community sector. More information: www.mccn.org.au

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