QMTN 2026 Online Forum Summary

27 August 2026

Overview

The Queensland Marine Turtle Network (QMTN) held its second online forum on 27 August 2026, bringing together around 50 participants to share nesting-season results, local conservation experience and plans for collaboration. Six presentations and updates covered the Queensland Turtle Conservation Project (QTCP), four member spotlights and QMTN activities. The forum opened with a welcome and acknowledgements of Traditional Owners by co-chairs Kate Hofmeister and Mark Hamann. Presenters and participants shared practical lessons on protecting nests, reducing light pollution and supporting the people who undertake monitoring.

DETSI 2025-26 Nesting Season Data Debrief

Dr. Kimberly Finlayson, Queensland Government Threatened Species Operations, reported another strong 2025/26 season at Mon Repos and the Woongarra Coast, with preliminary results showing 421 nesting loggerheads. Of these, 122 (29%) were first-time recorded breeders, an encouraging sign of recruitment into the breeding population. Flatback nesting numbers were the highest reported there since the 1970s. Loggerhead hatchling emergence success was approximately 80%.

The programme involved 198 volunteers, including participants from 11 community groups and five land and sea ranger groups, contributing more than 11,000 hours. More than 70 citizen scientists gained QTCP authorisations during the season. Island monitoring updates covered hawksbill, green and flatback nesting populations.

Discussion explored how nests at risk of inundation or erosion are assessed, and why loggerheads nesting at Wreck Island have not shown the recovery seen on the mainland. Differences in foraging areas and low recruitment were raised as possible explanations requiring further research. Satellite tracking also illustrated the connections between nesting beaches and distant feeding grounds.

Team Turtle CQ

Anyssa Mason, with contributions from Karl French, reported 68 volunteers monitoring 37 beaches on the Capricorn and Curtis coasts. They recorded 623 tracks and 494 nests: 467 flatback, 26 green and one loggerhead. Erosion, predation, artificial light and beach driving remain challenges. Priorities include training more volunteers for authorised activities and building skills to measure hatchling orientation. The youth-led Team Hatchlings programme held its fourth annual “Turtle Hour, Turtles About, so Lights Out!” dark skies campaign.

Turtle Watch Gold Coast

Jenna Versluis, Watergum and Sea World Foundation partnership, described monitoring from South Stradbroke Island to Rainbow Bay. Storm damage, king tides and city lighting complicate nest detection and hatchling protection. Work with Palm Beach Surf Club replaced floodlights with more wildlife-sensitive lighting. In discussion, Ebony King from Sunshine Coast Council highlighted that a lamp’s visible colour is not an indication of impactful lighting for wildlife, its spectrum must be checked for short wavelengths, including blue light.

Bribie Island National Park Turtle Conservation Team

Darren Jew described the work of around 12 volunteers under Sunshine Coast Turtle Care, monitoring a 17 km sector of northern Bribie Island. The team recorded 102 tracks and 58 nests in its sector, within a total of 75 nests across the national park. Across the park, 75 protective cages and 51 fences were installed, with approximately 6,000 hatchlings reported.

Beach erosion and vehicle access created continuing pressures. Prompt caging helped protect nests from pigs, foxes and goannas, although installation required substantial volunteer effort. A beach-access app combining tidal information with turtle and park guidance had reached around 1,200 users; 1,350 information flyers were also distributed.

JCU Sea Turtle Network and field programme

Prof. Mark Hamann, Charlie Pacey and Nisha introduced James Cook University's new student-led Sea Turtle Network, which had grown to 156 members. Ten field trips at Toolakea supported in-water turtle monitoring, including a recapture of a turtle first recorded there in 2011. Workshops, visiting speakers and student participation in the International Sea Turtle Symposium are helping build research skills. The network welcomed offers of guest talks, while Mark offered QMTN workshops in R, the statistical software used by many researchers.

QMTN progress and collaborative projects

Coordinator Dr Sean Williamson reported growth to 40 member organisations, four webinars and two newsletters over the preceding year. A nine-member management committee, co-chaired by Mark Hamann and Kate Hofmeister, had replaced the steering group. Coordination funding has been extended through September 2026 with Great Barrier Reef Foundation support.

The 2025 member survey received responses from 31 organisations and identified shared priorities for training, consistent data and reporting, and coordinated responses to threats. Work discussed included guidance on monitoring terms and approval processes, regular member snapshots, nesting-beach protection resources and a toolkit to help groups assess the social benefits of volunteering.

A proposed QMTN collaborative project assessing nesting-beach temperature would first map existing data and identify gaps, working with government, researchers and interested groups. Further stages would seek to support temperature loggers, standardised training and data storage, with sharing arrangements that respect each group's requirements. Monitoring would help assess both warming beaches and potential cooler refuges. Participants also raised interest in temperatures at turtle foraging sites.

Discussion outcomes and next steps

Training and volunteer succession, light pollution, and practical nest protection emerged repeatedly across the forum. Managing goanna impacts while recognising their role as native wildlife was suggested as a future webinar topic. A dedicated follow-up webinar was proposed for the temperature project.

At the forum, approximately $120,000 in grants was announced through the Great Barrier Reef Foundation and Containers for Change, with grants of up to $10,000 for eligible Traditional Owner and community group QMTN member organisations. The announced closing date was 14 September 2026. Members were directed to qmtn.org for grant information and network resources.

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