

MEDIA RELEASE



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Long-neck turtle is the favoured bush tucker food from the Daly River

An ongoing survey of the unique relationship between Indigenous communities and the Northern Territory's Daly River has revealed the long-neck turtle surpasses Barramundi as the most commonly taken bush tucker food.

The turtle lays its eggs under the water along the edge of billabongs, which need to dry down and then flood for the eggs to hatch. Changes to water use and river flows could reduce its population.

"This species is not on the radar of most other interest groups except conservation groups," says Dr Marcus Finn, Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge (TRaCK) program researcher. "But if those billabongs didn't fill any more because of water diversions or other land use changes, the turtles wouldn't breed and this would affect the food supply of Indigenous communities."

Dr Finn's survey demonstrates that Indigenous people's priorities are different to other river and water users, supporting the case for Indigenous interests to be considered specifically in water use plans.

"The National Water Initiative says that water plans have to take into account Indigenous interests," he says. "Government water planners know Indigenous people have a strong relationship with rivers but until now it's not been clear what those relationships are."

Over the past year, Dr Finn has regularly visited 48 households within the Nauiyu and Kybrook Farm communities and asked them how they have used the river in the previous two weeks.

He started his research by sitting around a map with community members and discussing what the important places along the river are, what time of year they go there, what species they catch, and how these species are culturally significant.

He says the communities were keen to participate in his survey because they can see that the project is trying to make their interests and relationships with the river clear to the broader community, so they see it as important.

"It also helps that those communities love fishing and love being out on country so it's easy for them to talk about it."

Dr Finn will present his research at the International River Symposium held at the Brisbane Convention Centre on Monday 21 September at 2pm.

Drawing together more than 70 of Australia's leading social, cultural, environmental and economic researchers, TRaCK focuses on Australia's tropical rivers and estuaries in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory with a degree of intensity, coordination and integration not previously seen in the region.

TRaCK receives major funding for its research through the Australian Government's Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities Initiative; the Australian Government's Raising National Water Standards Program; the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation; and the Queensland Government's Smart State Innovation Fund.

Photos available:

Benigna Ngalfundi using a stick to look for turtles lying dormant in the mud along the edge of a billabong near Nauiyu

Two photos of turtles cooking in the coals of a fire in Nauiyu

All high resolution, photographer – Dr Marcus Finn

Symposium program available:

www.riversymposium.com/index.php?page=Program

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