



Beach clean gives turtles a fighting chance to survive

By **EMILY DITCHBURN**

AS THE pitter-patter of tiny flippers begins in earnest on our beaches, environment groups are rallying together to ensure turtle hatchlings have the best possible chance at survival.

On January 31, volunteers from Sunshine Coast Council's TurtleCare group, Reef Check Australia and Underwater World SEA LIFE will clean up beaches and waterways between Mooloolaba and Caloundra.

During last year's clean-up, 100 volunteers collected a staggering 220kg of rubbish.

TurtleCare co-ordinator Kate Winter said members of the public were encouraged to join the clean-up.

"During the first years of their life, sea turtle hatchlings are pelagic and feed on the surface of the ocean. Small floating plastics are often mistaken for food and consumed by hatchlings and post-hatchling turtles off the Sunshine Coast beaches. This can potentially be fatal for all sea turtles," she said.

"This year, we'd love to have more of the community take part and raise awareness for this issue."

Reef Check Australia

snorkel volunteers will be cleaning up the Mooloolah River mouth, a popular spot for tourists, locals and consequently debris.

Reef Check Australia spokeswoman Jodi Salmond said marine debris killed more than one million sea birds and 100,000 sea mammals each year.

"Thousands of sea turtles ingest or become entangled in debris items every year, resulting in painful injuries and death," she said.

Miss Salmond said everyone could make a difference on the issue of marine debris by slightly changing their daily behaviours.

"It's estimated that over 80% of marine debris collected originates from the land. With six million tonnes of rubbish making its way into our oceans every single year, community clean-ups highlight the direct effect that this 'stuff' from our daily lives has on these important ecosystems," she said.

As of Friday, two endangered loggerhead turtle nests had emerged on Sunshine Coast beaches, and about 30 were still incubating.

Nests were expected to continue emerging into February, Ms Winter said.

The findings from the first nest were cause for optimism.

"The nest emergences have been very successful, with over 90% success recorded on the first nest," Ms Winter said.

"The 2014/2015 (nesting) has been busy so far; we are still expecting several turtles to lay their final nests for the season in the coming weeks.

"Several nests have required relocation this season due to threats such as high tides, erosion and light pollution."

On Buddina Beach last Thursday, a group of about 15 dedicated TurtleCare volunteers inspected the second nest to emerge.

Buddina resident Wayne Bennett was present when the nest emerged two nights before, and captured the moment the first hatchlings began digging themselves out.

The clean-up will begin at 6.15am on Saturday, January 31.

All volunteers will receive a Picitup shoulder bag and one free general admission to Underwater World SEA LIFE.

Register online at the www.turtlecare.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au and select which beach you would like to clean.

HELP CLEAN UP

Clean-up locations across the Sunshine Coast:

- La Balsa Park, Point Cartwright
- SEA LIFE Underwater World, Parkyn Parade Mooloolaba
- BA 201 Buddina
- BA 234 Warana
- BA 241 Bokarina
- BA 260 Currimundi (Buderim St)
- BA 267 Moffat / Dicky Beach
- BA 281 Shelly Beach

WHAT: Beach clean-up between Mooloolaba and Caloundra

WHERE: Various locations

WHEN: January 31, meet at 6.15am



TEAM EFFORT: TurtleCare volunteer Tahlia Thompson inspects a loggerhead turtle nest on Buddina Beach, with co-ordinator Kate Winter overseeing.

PHOTO: EMILY DITCHBURN



IT'S TIME: Hatchlings scramble from the Buddina Beach nest.



PHOTO: WAYNE BENNETT



Sunshine Coast Council, ReefCheck Australia and Underwater World SEALIFE Mooloolaba are calling on residents to join a massive beach clean-up event on January 31.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED