

# Climate change a threat



TROUBLE ON THE HORIZON . . . JCU turtle researcher Mariana Fuentes and her colleagues have published a study about the affects of climate change on turtle eggs.

By RACHEL TOUNE

TURTLE eggs could risk becoming overcooked as the temperature of sand rises due to the affects of climate change.

By 2070 it is predicted the temperatures of sand in many areas will be blistering, meaning the eggs will not be able to survive.

Townsville James Cook University scientist Mariana Fuentes and her colleagues have published a study of the threats turtles face due to climate change, to find out which factors should be of most concern.

The researchers gathered studies about the threats impacting sea turtles and used expert knowledge to work out what needs to be addressed urgently.

"Basically with climate change it's not only going to be one factor affecting turtles at the one time, like increasing temperatures or cyclonic conditions," Ms Fuentes said.

"We need to prioritise and make decisions about which climatic factor will have the most impact to the population."

By 2030 the researchers predicted sea levels rising would be the most harmful factor for turtle breeding grounds.

But, in the longer term, Ms Fuentes said increasing temperature was the most

worrying factor when it came to ensuring turtles were not affected by climate change.

"(The eggs) just overcook and there are no hatchlings coming out," she said.

The temperature of the sand can determine the sex of turtle eggs, with warmer conditions resulting in more females being produced.

Ms Fuentes said when the temperature was any hotter, there would be a reduction in the number of hatchlings being born, as well as deformities.

If the temperature reaches more than about 33C the eggs will die.

"The main thing is reducing greenhouse gases, not only for turtles but for all flora and fauna," she said.

She said it was now up to management authorities, including the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, which were recognising the threats and taking steps to reduce the impact of climate change.

"There are things that can be done but it can vary from place to place.

"The problem with this population is they are nesting on remote beaches."

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