

Turtle Threats: Commercial Fishing

Turtles are vulnerable to a range of threats because:

- When baby turtles are born they are on their own; their mothers aren't around to care for them or teach them how to avoid threats.
- They don't begin breeding until they are about 30 to 40 years old (depending on the species).
- Development and lighting along the coast disturb turtles that need to nest on or close to the same beach that they originally hatched on, and stop the hatchlings from being able to find the ocean.
- Their gender is dependent on the temperature of the sand in which the eggs are hatched: the warmer the sand, the more females will be born. This means that climate change, which will raise temperatures around the globe, could result in too many female turtles and not enough males.
- They make long migrations. Spending so much time travelling in the water means that they are exposed to more impacts, as turtles may travel from safe waters to waters that are full of dangers such as fishing nets, boats or marine debris. They have poor hearing and sight when above the surface of the water. This means boats often hit them.
- There are a range of threats to nesting beaches and nests, including predators, people, vehicles, varying temperatures, and flooding or natural erosion (washing nests away).



How does commercial fishing threaten turtles?

- Large and small fishing vessels often accidentally catch turtles. Caught in nets, on lines or on hooks, the turtles will often drown. They are then thrown back into the sea as bycatch or sold for money.
- Turtles are still hunted by Indigenous communities for traditional ceremonies and food, although this practice is declining in some places.
- Turtles are also still hunted in large numbers to be sold in commercial markets.
- Many fishing vessels will throw old nets into the sea. These are known as ghost nets. As they drift, ghost nets entangle anything in their path. This includes fish, sharks, dolphins, seals, marine turtles and seabirds. They have also been known to kill crocodiles, dugongs and other vertebrates. But it is marine turtles that are most at risk.



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Once you have read through this information, you will need to work in your groups to create a poster or presentation to share with the other people in your class. You will need to undertake the research necessary to find out the answers to the following points and then include this information in your poster or presentation:

- A description of the threat
- How this threat affects turtles
- Where this threat occurs
- The particular species of turtle that is/are affected



In addition, pick one of the following questions to answer:

- How are the threats of ghost nets being addressed in northern Australia?
- What is one thing we can all do to minimise the impacts of commercial fishing on turtles? e.g. which types of fishing have the least amount of bycatch?
- What is one thing that you found interesting or important about commercial fishing and/or turtles that you want to share with the class?

Work in your groups to create a poster or presentation to share the information you have found.

Some places to get information about marine turtles:

- WWF - Green Turtle and Hawksbill Turtle
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority - Marine Turtles
- Australian Government Department of Environment and Energy - Marine Turtles in Australia
- Sea Turtle Foundation
- Western Cape Turtle Threat Abatement Alliance
- Department of Environment and Heritage Protection - Marine Turtles
- Reef Guardian Schools - Marine Turtles.

Some places to get information about commercial fishing:

- WWF - Wild Seafood
- Australian Marine Conservation Society - Fishing Issues
- National Geographic - Sustainable Fishing.

