Flatback Sea Turtle Quick Fact Sheet

Common Name: Australian flatback - named because its shell is very flat.

Scientific Name: *Natator depressus*

Description: Head has a single pair of prefrontal scales (scales in front of its eyes). Carapace is bony without ridges and has large, non-overlapping, scutes (scales) present with only 4 lateral scutes. Carapace is oval or round and body is very flat. Flippers have 1 claw. Edge of carapace is folded and covered by thin, non-overlapping waxy scutes. Carapace is olive-grey with pale brown/yellow tones on margins and the flippers creamy white. The scutes of the hatchlings form a unique dark-grey reticulate pattern, and the center of each scute is olive colored.

Size & Weight: Adults measure up to 3.25 feet in carapace length (99 cm). Adults weigh an average of 198 pounds (90 kg).

Diet: Apparently eats sea cucumbers, jellyfish, mollusks, prawns, bryozoans, other invertebrates and seaweed.

Habitat: Prefer turbid inshore waters, bays, coastal coral reef and grassy shallows.

Nesting: Nests 4 times per season. Lays an average of 50 eggs at time, but these are comparatively quite large. The eggs incubate for about 55 days. When the hatchlings emerge, they are larger than most species.

Range: Very limited. It is found only in the waters around Australia and Papua New Guinea in the Pacific.

Status: *Australia* - Listed as Vulnerable under the Australian Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act. *International* - Listed as Data Deficient, not enough information available to make a determination of status.

Threats to Survival: Sea turtles are threatened with capture, harvesting of eggs, destruction of nesting beaches, ocean pollution, oil spills and entanglement in fishing and shrimp nets. Flatbacks are not fished commercially, but are taken as substence food. Their limited range makes them vulnerable to change of their habitat and over-exploitation.

Population Estimate: 20,000 - 21,000 nesting females.