

Mangguru (marine turtles) and Balguja (dugong) Monitoring Project: Looking after Turtles and Dugongs on Wunambal Gaambera Country, North Kimberley

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Indigenous communities have increasingly been expressing their aspirations for the management of their marine and coastal environments through a process known as sea country planning. The Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation, representing the Traditional Owner community associated with the Uunguu Native Title Determination, has chosen to create a “Healthy Country Plan”, which was developed by the local Traditional Owners and establishes targets for monitoring and maintaining a healthy sea country, including marine species and habitats. In order for the plan to be effective, support for implementation is crucial, and research and data collection are essential components of many of the goals set out. This project is

an example of participatory action research which incorporates effective, community-friendly data collection and mapping methods to monitor turtles and dugongs on Wunambal Gaambera country. Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation, it’s Uunguu Rangers the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance, and CSIRO are collaborating through a project funded by the National Environmental Research Program to develop a new boat-based transect method for monitoring local marine turtle and dugong populations. Analysis of preliminary survey data shows that standard distance sampling methods can be applied to small-boat surveys of marine animals to obtain reliable estimates of their distribution and abundance.