

West Pilbara Turtle Program



PROGRAM SUMMARY 2019-20

Background

A brief history of the program

- The program is a partnership between Rio Tinto and the Parks and Wildlife Service (P&WS) of Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), bringing together industry, government and the community to monitor, raise awareness and protect marine turtles across the Pilbara
- WPTP has been operating since 2005 – 15 years
- Over 450 people have signed up as volunteers, since 2005
- 30-50 volunteers actively conduct beach monitoring each year
- Since 2014-15, retention of volunteers has increased and experienced volunteers have increased the number of days they contribute to beach monitoring.



Monitoring methodology 2019-20

- Monitoring methodology is based on methodology used for Ningaloo Turtle Program and Care for Hedland Turtle Program
- This year, the following beaches were monitored over a number of peak nesting periods to gain a broader insight into turtle activity in the region and improve the efficiency of monitoring:
 - Bells Beach and Boat Beach, Wickham
 - 7 – 21 November 2019
 - 26 November – 17 December 2019
 - 2 – 17 January 2020
 - Cleaverville
 - 26 November – 19 December 2019
- Data are collected digitally using the ODK Collect app
- The yearly estimates of nest numbers and total tracks have been derived from a model developed by A. Whiting in 2018 and used data collected from three sampling periods
- *In March 2020, a global pandemic was announced for the COVID-19 virus and significant disruption to society followed. Restrictions in place to manage the pandemic in WA, resulted in fewer opportunities for WPTP activities from March to June 2020. Additional protocols will be in place for the 2020-21 monitoring season to manage COVID-19 risk.*

For more information contact the WPTP Coordinator. Phone: 9182 2031. Email: wptp@dbca.wa.gov.au

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Our findings – monitoring data

Monitoring effort

- In 2019-20, there were 128 monitoring days respectively, covering 4 beaches (Bells, Yacht Club, Boat beaches and Cleaverville)
- In 2018-19 and 2019-20, we have predicted nest numbers at a new beach, Boat Beach and have begun to collect a consistent data set for Cleaverville.

Species identified

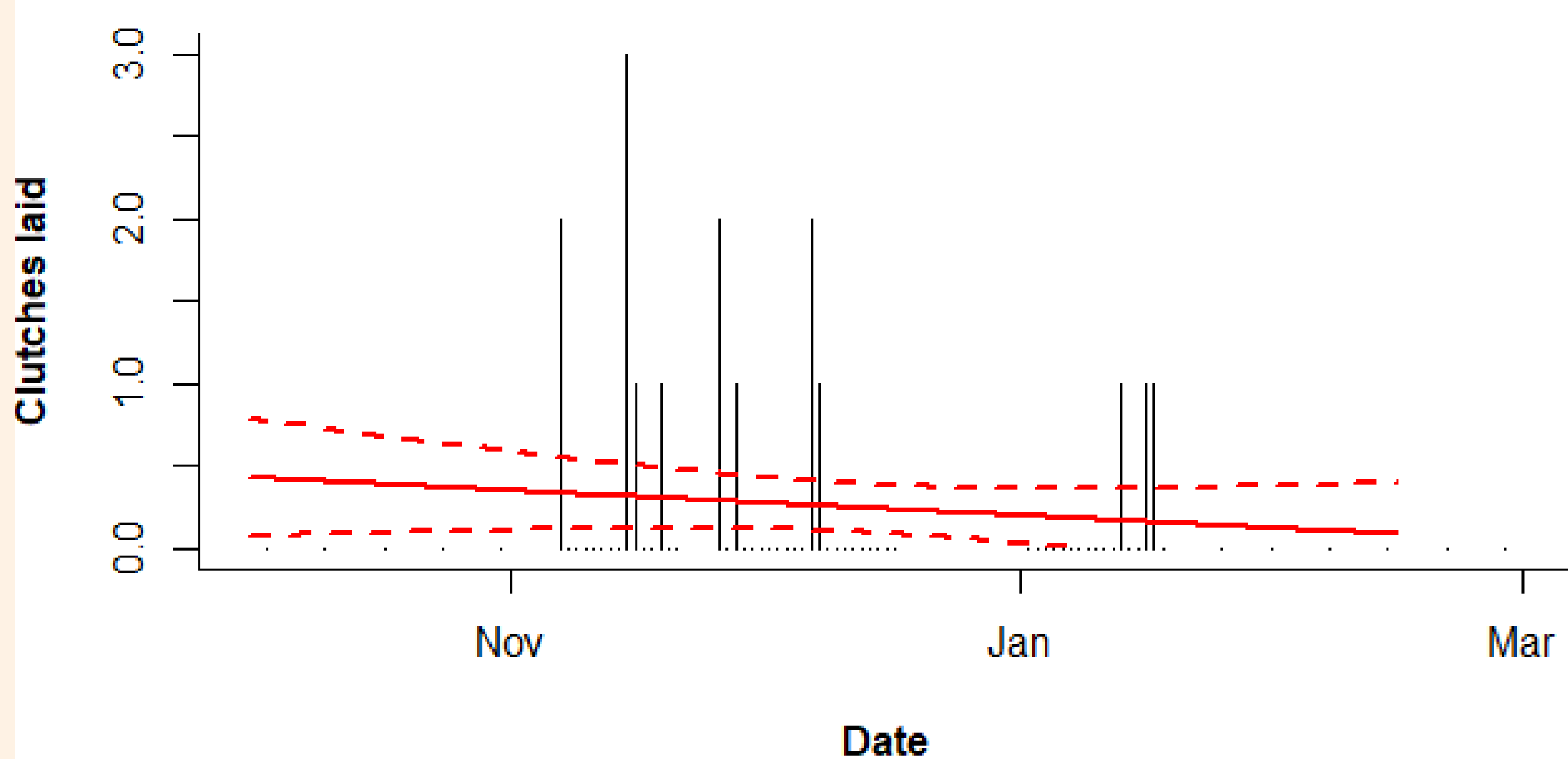
- All tracks and nests were identified as belonging to flatback (*Natator depressus*) turtles except one hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) turtle false crawl and 14 tracks that were recorded as unknown by volunteers.

Predation/disturbance 2019-20

- 7 reports of disturbance to nests across all beaches – all of which the disturbance was unknown
- 47 reports of general disturbance to nesting beaches – mostly vehicle, dog, cat and fox tracks on Boat Beach and Cleaverville (none at Bells Beach)
- Predator trapping was undertaken by Rio Tinto in January 2020 on Cape Lambert.

Number of monitoring days and nests recorded at each monitoring beach, 2019-20

Site	Days monitored	Nests
Bells and Yacht Club beaches	64	187
Boat Beach	41	14
Cleaverville	23	17

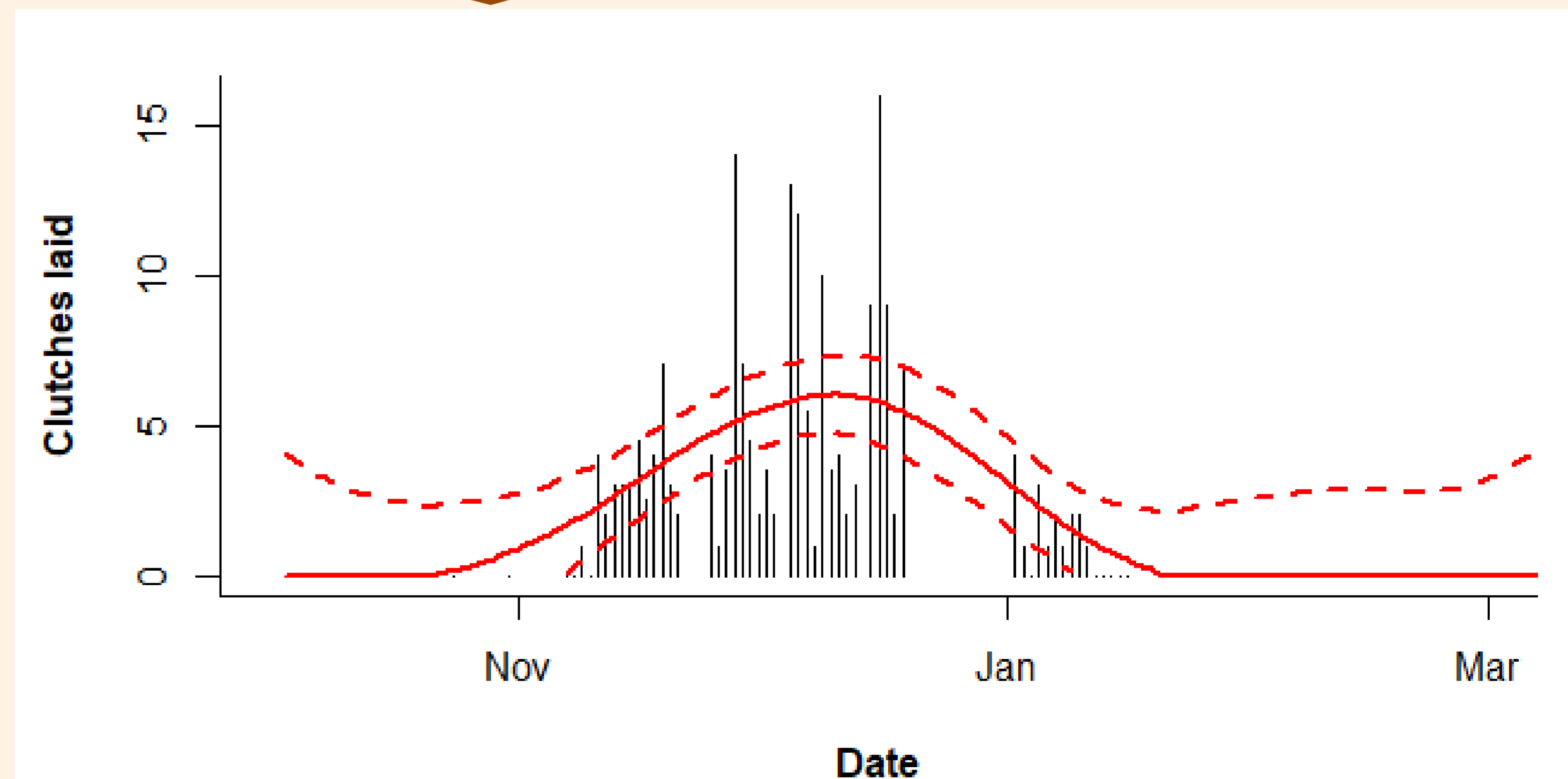


Boat Beach 2019-20

- Actual count: **14 nests over 41 days**
- Model prediction: **35 nests for season (error range: 9-65)**
- Black vertical bars are actual counts, red lines show model with upper and lower limits.

Bells Beach 2019-20

- Actual count: **187 nests over 64 days**
- Model prediction: **289 nests for season (error range: 183-616)**
- Black vertical bars are actual counts, red lines show model with upper and lower limits.



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Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions



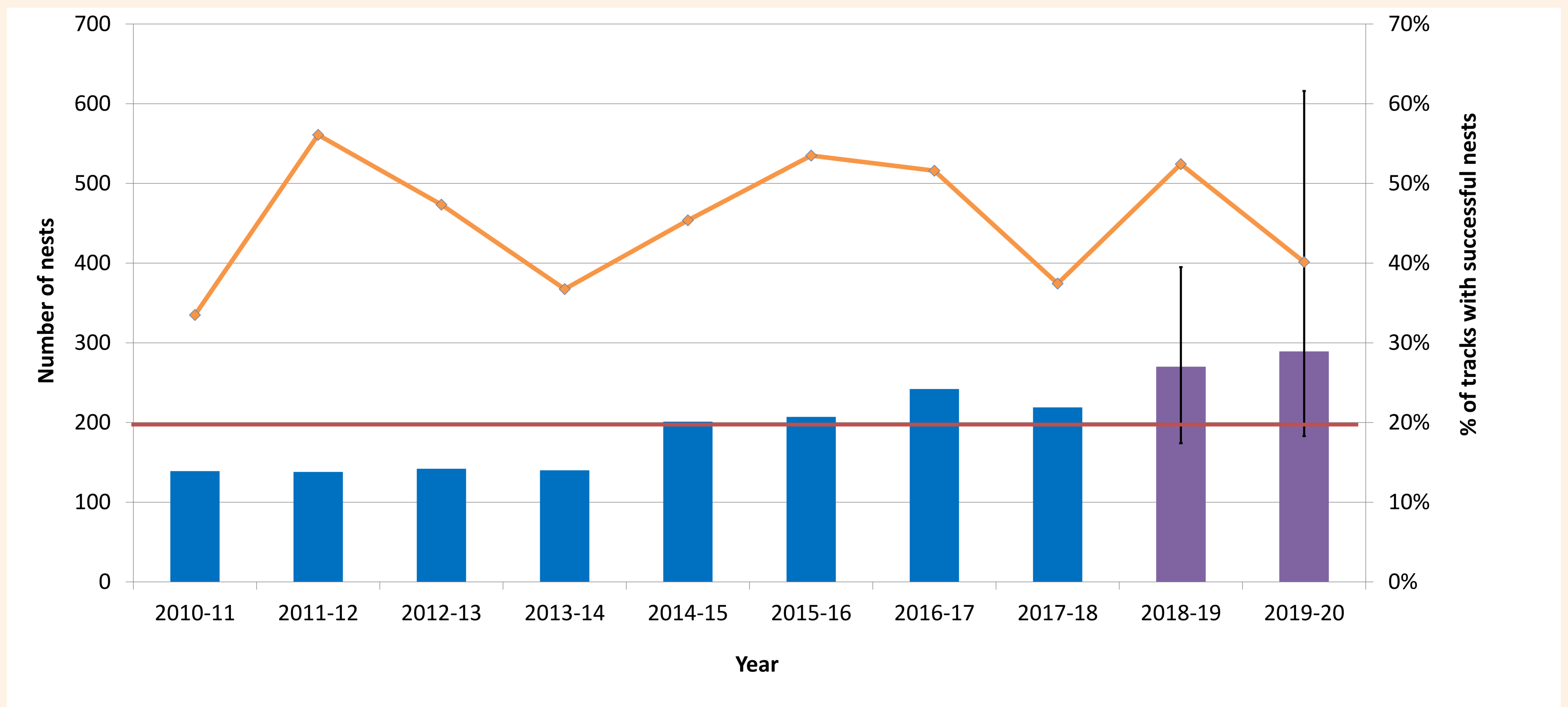
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Our findings – long term nesting trends

- Similar to 2018-19, modelled data for 2019-20 showed it was a successful nesting season for flatback turtles
- Over the same date ranges, we had 187 nests this year (2019-20), 167 nests last year (2018-19) and 133 the year before (2017-18)
- The number of nests predicted by the model this year (289 nests) was again well above the average number of nests over ten seasons (196 nests)
- The graph below shows the number of nests recorded (blue bars) or modelled (purple bars) each year, the percentage of tracks with successful nests (orange line) and the average number of nests from 2010-11 to present (red line). The error lines or the purple bars (modelled number of nests) show the error range predicted by the model.



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Other achievements – promotion and education



Calendar of events



Metal straws



Shopping bags and produce bags ready for 2020-21 activities



KSHS at Boat Beach



Hats and t-shirts



Promotional activities

- In 2019-20 we had 6 promotional projects and many avenues for promoting the program amongst the local community
- We raised \$416 for Ningaloo Turtle Rehabilitation Centre Exmouth through our gold coin donations for metal straws
- Over 500 people engaged with our stall at FeNaCING and we had presence on Facebook and local radio stations
- We held a stall at Dampier markets where more volunteers signed up for the program
- We purchased new t-shirts and hats to protect our volunteers while doing field work and to promote the program.

Note: There were fewer opportunities for promotion and education activities in 2020 due to COVID-19.



World Turtle Day, craft competition winner, Ashlee Radley



Family monitoring days

Talking with Dampier Primary School students



Educational activities

- The new funding agreement with Rio Tinto, allowed us to expand our educational activities and we held 27 events including talks to primary schools, daycare or Ready Set School students, a craft competition for World Turtle Day, a project with the Karratha Senior High School (KSHS) integrated science students and family monitoring days
- We made contact with many other local groups and schools and hope to build the educational component of the program in the future
- We are planning cultural awareness training with Ngarluma Aboriginal Corporation and hope to involve them in other WPTP activities.

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Other achievements – working with others



Program launch

Working with others

- We had many activities in 2019-20 that involved other community groups or government agencies such as:
 - WPTP program launch and beach clean-ups with Wickham Tidy Towns
 - Active management of nests laid on public beaches with City of Karratha and Rio Tinto
 - Joint messaging and educational material with Rio Tinto and the City of Karratha
 - One night tour with the North West Shelf Flatback Turtle Conservation Program (NWSFTCP) and the Police and Community Youth Centres (PCYC)
 - Work with Pilbara Dive and Tours to promote the program and share volunteering experiences
 - Promotion of the program through City of Karratha networks
 - Work with Karratha Community House to deliver turtle talks to their programs and share information about the program.



Active management and signage at Boat Beach



Night tours with NWSFTCP and PCYC Roebourne



Karratha Community House

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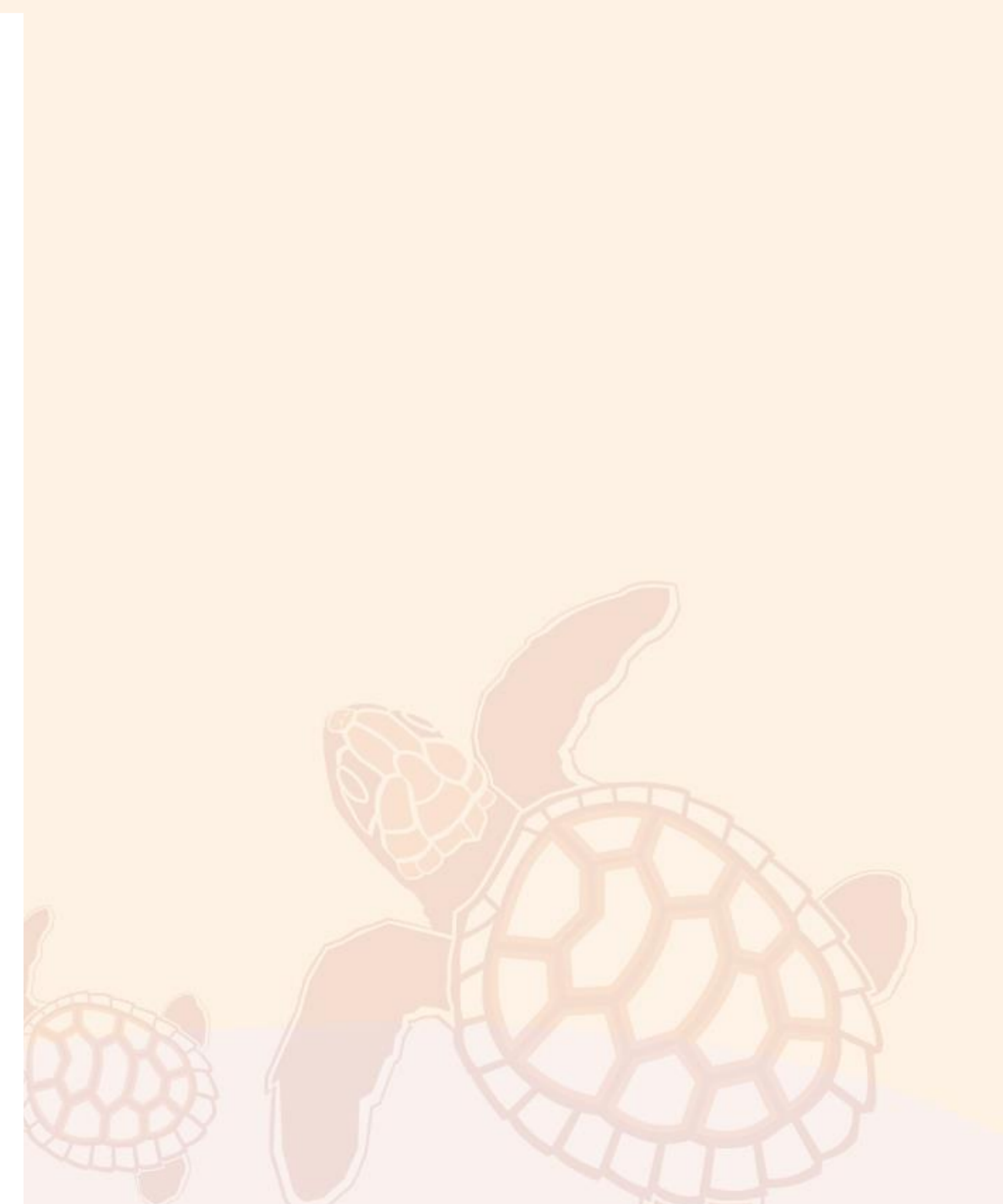
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Summary

- The program has achieved many things in 2019-20 and has continued to build on the success of the program
- Our monitoring data shows higher than average numbers of nests recorded at Bells Beach in the past six years (since 2014/15 nesting season)
- We now have two years of data from Boat Beach and Cleaverville that show between 14-41 nests on these important recreational beaches
- Disturbances at Boat Beach and Cleaverville are primarily vehicles, cats, dogs and human disturbances, on Bells Beach less disturbance was recorded
- We have continued interest in the program from community members, volunteers, schools, daycare, businesses and other local community groups again with 60 new volunteers signing up for the season
- We continue to educate the community about WPTP and marine turtle conservation through school talks, community events and connections with other organisation
- In 2020, WPTP connected regularly with other turtle programs across the region, particularly Ningaloo Turtle Program and led a region wide, turtle program debrief which included input from the North West Shelf Flatback Turtle Conservation Program
- Improvements identified for 2020-21 include:
 - increased work with Ngarluma to ensure they are involved in turtle work on their country
 - more work with schools and community groups around marine turtle education and conservation
 - improved communication and management of Boat Beach and Cleaverville with the City of Karratha.



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