



PROTECTING THE TIWI'S TURTLES

Matilda Minerals are playing an important role in researching and protecting the Olive Ridley sea turtle on the Tiwi Islands.

The Tiwi Islands are one of a number of breeding areas for the Olive Ridley turtle in Northern Australia and, although little is known about the species, it is understood there are a limited number of nesting females left in Australia.

Matilda Minerals is working closely with the Tiwi Land Council and Charles Darwin University to monitor the Olive Ridley's breeding areas and assist with vital research into the turtles, which have been officially classified as an endangered species by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.



A nest of Olive Ridley turtle hatchlings



A hatchling makes its way to the ocean

Once widely hunted for their meat and leather, Olive Ridley turtle numbers have yet to recover. Some beaches on the Tiwi Islands are nesting areas for these turtles, and although they enjoy a level of protection today, they still come under constant threat from predators and marine debris such as fishing nets. Monitoring by the Tiwi Land Council and Matilda has shown that current predators include crocodiles that take turtles as they are nesting, and feral dogs and goannas that dig up the nests and eat the eggs.

The Company has developed a partnership with the Tiwi Land Council, which is responsible for land and coastal management on the Tiwi Islands on behalf of the traditional Tiwi owners, to engage a Marine Ranger to assist with sea turtle monitoring activities.

Dr Michael Guinea from Charles Darwin University worked with Matilda Minerals to develop the monitoring program and establish a way to ensure the eggs remain safely in their nests until they hatch.

According to Dr Guinea, the monitoring conducted by Matilda is providing new data on sea turtles.

"Matilda Minerals monitors five beaches on the Tiwi Islands approximately every two weeks to review sea turtle nesting activities, recording new nests, different sea turtle species, signs of predators and new hatchlings. Beaches are surveyed on foot or using Matilda's research boat," Dr Guinea explained.



Matilda staff conducting sea turtle monitoring

"Matilda approached me with concern over the danger of the nests being disturbed during the incubation period, and based on my recommendations they have implemented a mesh and peg system that deters predators from digging up the nests, but still allows the hatchlings to find their way to the ocean," he said.

The nest protection program has been in place for six months. Preliminary data indicates that, in some cases, the mesh is deterring predators from raiding sea turtle nests, resulting in an increased number of hatchlings making their way to the ocean safely.



A turtle nest protected by the peg and mesh system

GROWING THE MILIKAPITI NURSERY

As part of the Company's commitment to sustainable development, Matilda Minerals is working with the local community through the Land Council on the Tiwi Islands to establish a nursery.

The initial aim of the nursery is to cultivate native plant species to be used to rehabilitate the mine site. Looking into the future, the nursery plans to expand to grow plants and seedlings for the plantation forestry on the Islands, or for export to mainland nurseries.



Bush apple seedlings

Over the past 18 months, Matilda has been working with the Tiwi Land Council, the Milikapiti community and personnel from Charles Darwin University to establish a Nursery Business Plan. The project has continued to progress well, and late last year infrastructure for the nursery was completed, a nursery Manager was appointed, and the Tiwi Land Council recruited a team of staff.

According to Tiwi Land Council Environmental Manager Kate Hadden, the program is going from strength to strength.

“One of the major benefits to come out of the nursery program is that a number of local women have been employed in the team, giving them an important role in the care of the land, and allowing them to be actively involved in the nursery industry, from seed collecting right through to planting,” Kate said. “The long term plan is for the nursery to provide full time employment for local people, without the need for



Bush peanut seedlings

subsidised wages.”

Matilda continues to contribute to the project by providing financial support for materials and salaries for staff. In addition, Matilda is working to equip nursery staff with the necessary skills by providing training with the help of their rehabilitation consultant and Greening Australia.

A seed collection training day was held at the mine site in November, and during the day staff were shown how to harvest grasses and seeds for propagation. Since then, the team has returned to site to collect additional seeds and grasses, which have been potted and cultivated at the nursery.

Earlier this year, Matilda hosted a second training day to trial different rehabilitation methods. Nursery staff worked in three areas, planting seedlings from the nursery and also using a direct seeding method. Matilda Minerals and nursery staff are now monitoring the success of this first rehabilitation trial. We will keep you posted on their progress!



Matilda's rehabilitation site

MATILDA
MINERALS

45 Richardson Street West Perth WA 6005
Telephone: 08 9481 1444
Facsimile: 08 9322 1466
www.matildaminerals.com



Printed on recycled paper