



Gabrielle Upton
Environment Minister

MEDIA RELEASE

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HUGE HOPE FOR TINY TURTLES

The conservation effort to save the Bellinger River Snapping Turtle from extinction has received a huge boost after 21 tiny turtles hatched as part of a NSW Government captive breeding program, Environment Minister Gabrielle Upton said today.

The turtles began to hatch on 19 January as part of the first ever breeding program for this critically endangered species.

“There could be as few as 200 Bellinger River Snapping Turtles remaining in the wild, so these hatchlings have a vital role to play in rebuilding this population,” Ms Upton said.

Taronga Zoo established the breeding program after a newly discovered disease wiped out up to 90 per cent of the local population of Bellinger River Snapping Turtles on the NSW mid-north coast near Bellingen in 2015.

A Government emergency response team was formed to investigate and coordinate the rescue of a group of healthy turtles to establish an insurance population.

Taronga Keeper Adam Skidmore said he was surprised at how quickly the turtles had settled into their new home, with four of the five females producing eggs this breeding season.

“We weren’t really expecting any hatchlings this year, so it was an amazing result to get four clutches of eggs. The team was very excited to see the first hatchlings push their way out of the eggs,” Mr Skidmore said.

Weighing 4-5 grams at birth, the hatchlings have begun eating and swimming and are being closely monitored by keepers in a special quarantine facility at Taronga.

The long-term aim of the breeding program is to raise and release hatchlings back into Bellinger River. Meanwhile, Australian Registry of Wildlife Health researchers continue to investigate the cause of the disease and monitor the remaining turtles and other wildlife in the Bellinger River catchment system.