MEDIA RELEASE

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Conservation Efforts Underway to Protect the Gulf Snapping Turtle

The Gulf Snapping Turtle (*Elseya lavarackorum*), Australia's largest freshwater turtle, is now the focus of renewed efforts to improve its survival through investment in habitat protection, monitoring, and threat mitigation.

For decades, this unique species was believed to be extinct until it was rediscovered in the river systems that flow into the Gulf of Carpentaria. Found nowhere else on Earth, the turtle remains critically endangered, facing mounting threats from feral pigs.

Feral predation and habitat destruction have a major impact on hatchling survival, leading to reduced population numbers within river systems. Research by ecologist Alastair Freeman found that feral pigs predated four of the seven known nest sites, which highlight the scale of the threat.

Through Queensland Government's Natural Resource Management Expansion Program, Southern Gulf NRM, with our partners, is taking action to give this ancient species a fighting chance. Their new project, *Protection of the Gulf Snapping Turtle in the Southern Gulf*, runs from September 2025 to December 2028, delivering long-term conservation benefits for rivers, wildlife, and local managers. Monitoring activities include environmental DNA (eDNA) surveys, riparian condition assessments to measure habitat quality, disturbance and suitability for nesting and foraging, and early detection surveillance for invasive species such as tilapia.

"This incredible turtle is part of the Gulf's natural identity, it's tough, resilient, and deeply connected to the landscape," said Damian Miley, Southern Gulf NRM's CEO. *"We're working with Land managers, Traditional Owners and researchers to protect nesting sites, reduce threats, and help this species thrive once again."*

"Paraway is proud to work with Southern Gulf NRM to protect the Gulf Snapping Turtle and the waterways that sustain both our grazing operations and the wider environment," said Paul McDougall, Paraway Pastoral Company's Manager – Natural Capital.

Feral pigs dig up nests, eat eggs and hatchlings, and destroy fragile riverbanks. By reducing pig numbers, the project will allow nests to remain undisturbed, boost hatchling survival, and improve water quality in key turtle habitats.

This project is delivered in collaboration with landholders, Nature North, Feral Vertabrate Reduction Contracting Pty Ltd, and TropWater at James Cook University, combining local knowledge, on-ground expertise and scientific leadership.

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Southern Gulf NRM is the Natural Resource Management organisation for the Southern Gulf region of north west Queensland. We work with the community to deliver projects that improve and protect our region's natural resources and to maintain the prosperity of industries that rely on these. The Southern Gulf water catchment region includes all the land whose creeks and rivers run into the southern Gulf of Carpentaria. This encompasses an area of 215,000km square^2.