



Giving hatchlings a chance

By **EMILY DITCHBURN**

AS THE pitter-patter of tiny flippers begins in earnest on our beaches, environment groups are rallying together to ensure turtle hatchlings have the best possible chance at survival.

On January 31, volunteers from Sunshine Coast Council's TurtleCare group, Reef Check Australia and Underwater World SEA LIFE will clean up beaches and waterways between Mooloolaba and Caloundra.

During last year's clean-up, 100 volunteers collected a staggering 220kg of rubbish.

TurtleCare co-ordinator Kate Winter said members of the public were encouraged to join the clean-up.

"During the first years of their life, sea turtle hatchlings are pelagic and feed on the surface of the ocean. Small floating plastics are often mistaken for food and consumed by hatchlings and post-hatchling turtles off the Sunshine Coast beaches. This can potentially be fatal for all sea turtles," she said.

"This year, we'd love to have more of the community take part and raise awareness for this issue."

Reef Check Australia snorkel volunteers will be cleaning up the Mooloolah River mouth, a popular spot for tourists, locals and consequently debris.

Reef Check Australia spokeswoman Jodi Salmond said marine debris killed more than one million sea birds and 100,000 sea

mammals each year.

"Thousands of sea turtles ingest or become entangled in debris items every year, resulting in painful injuries

and death," she said.

Miss Salmond said everyone could make a difference on the issue of marine debris by slightly changing their daily behaviours.

"It's estimated that over 80% of marine debris collected originates from the land. With six million tonnes of rubbish making its way into our oceans every single year, community clean-ups highlight the direct effect that this stuff from our daily lives has on these important

ecosystems," she said.

As of Friday, two endangered loggerhead turtle nests had emerged on Sunshine Coast beaches, and about 30 were still incubating.

Nests were expected to continue emerging into February, Ms Winter said.

"The nest emergences have been very successful, with over 90% success recorded on the first nest," she said.

"Several nests have required relocation this season due to threats such as high tides, erosion and light pollution."

On Buddina Beach last Thursday, a group of about 15 dedicated TurtleCare volunteers inspected the second nest to emerge.

The clean-up will begin at 6.15am on Saturday, January 31. Volunteers will receive a Picitup shoulder bag and a free general

admission to Underwater World SEA LIFE. Register at www.turtlecare.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au.

BEACH CLEAN-UP

WHERE: Various locations between Mooloolaba and Caloundra

WHEN: January 31, meet at 6.15am



Hatchlings emerging from the Buddina Beach nest last Wednesday night.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED



Sunshine Coast Council, ReefCheck Australia and Underwater World SEA LIFE Mooloolaba are calling on residents to join a massive beach clean-up on Saturday, January 31.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED



NEST INSPECTION: TurtleCare volunteer Tahlia Thompson looks at a loggerhead turtle nest on Buddina Beach with co-ordinator Kate Winter overseeing.

PHOTO: EMILY DITCHBURN