



GIRL POWER: Green turtles face extinction as high temperatures lead to fewer males being born at rookeries on the northern coastline (inset). Main picture: Lachie Millard

IT'S NOT EASY BEING A GREEN TURTLE LOOKING FOR MR RIGHT ON THE REEF

CHRIS HONNERY

GREEN turtles could become extinct, as research reveals up to 99 per cent of the reptiles are born female.

Warming temperatures in the northern Great Barrier Reef have caused the phenomenon and Australian and American scientists warn that, if the trend continues, it could

result in a lack of male turtles, leading to extinction.

The northern reef is home to one of the world's largest green turtle populations and a paper published today in *Current Biology* calls for new management strategies.

Researchers said that lower incubation temperatures were necessary at rookeries along Queensland's

coast to reduce the increasing number of female turtles.

The sex of sea turtle hatchlings is determined by the incubation temperature of the eggs laid in the sand, with the proportion of females rising as temperatures increase.

The study found 65-69 per cent of green turtles in the cooler southern reef were female, while a "stagger-

ing" 87 to 99.8 per cent of green turtles in the warmer northern reef were female.

"These results suggest that increased sand temperatures affect the sex ratios of the (northern reef) population such that virtually no male turtles are now being produced from these nesting beaches," researchers wrote. "Our study high-

lights the need for immediate management strategies aimed at lowering incubation temperatures at key rookeries to boost the ability of local turtle populations to adapt to the changing environment."

The research also found an already-low hatchling survival rate due to increasing water levels, altered weather, and habitat warming.