

BELLINGER RIVER TURTLE DEATHS

Following the discovery of Bellinger River Snapping Turtles (*Myuchelys georgesi*) dead and dying in the Bellinger River late last month, a response team has been established to attempt to determine the cause.

Only Bellinger River Snapping Turtles are affected, with almost 300 severely affected or dead turtles found to date with severe internal symptoms including major organ damage. External symptoms include blindness leading to the inability to feed and subsequent starvation.

Hygiene protocols have been specially developed to avoid the potential to spread any disease pathogen until more is known.

As a precautionary measure to limit disease spread from the lower Bellinger River, the upper catchment area in New England National Park including Brinerville has been closed to the public until further notice.

The aim of this closure is to minimise the potential threat of introducing any potential pathogen into the pristine environment of this section of park until the cause and extent of the problem in the lower catchment has been determined.

WHAT'S CAUSING THE DISEASE?

The cause of the disease is yet to be determined.

Pathologists from the nation's leading animal health laboratories are continuing to work on analysis of this disease outbreak and have co-opted specialist support from interstate and overseas. No conclusive evidence about the type or nature of the pathogen has yet been identified.

Dead and dying turtles have been removed from the river to reduce the chance of other animals moving infected turtles to other catchments and potentially spreading the pathogens.

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) took samples from the Bellinger River at four key locations when the situation was first reported.

Analysis identified no pesticides were detected at any of the four sample sites.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

This outbreak is specific to one species of turtle and does not affect humans.

To help prevent potential spread of the disease, people are advised report sick turtle sightings but not to enter the water, handle the turtles or try to capture any turtles in the Bellinger River.

People swimming in the river are asked to swim only in one location to avoid affecting other areas.

If people are using canoes or other water craft or equipment it is recommended that they are washed down with warm soapy water and thoroughly dried for 24–48 hours before re-use. Avoid using in other waterways if at all possible.

CONTACT

Telephone 131 555 to report any sightings of sick or dead turtles.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

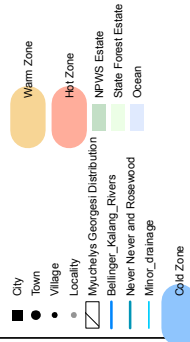
The response is being led by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, with support from Bellinger Shire Council, Taronga Zoo, NSW Department of Primary Industries, Local Land Services, Wildlife Health Australia, the Environment Protection Authority, WIRES and the local community.



Scale: 1 : 200,000



LEGEND



PRODUCTION INFORMATION

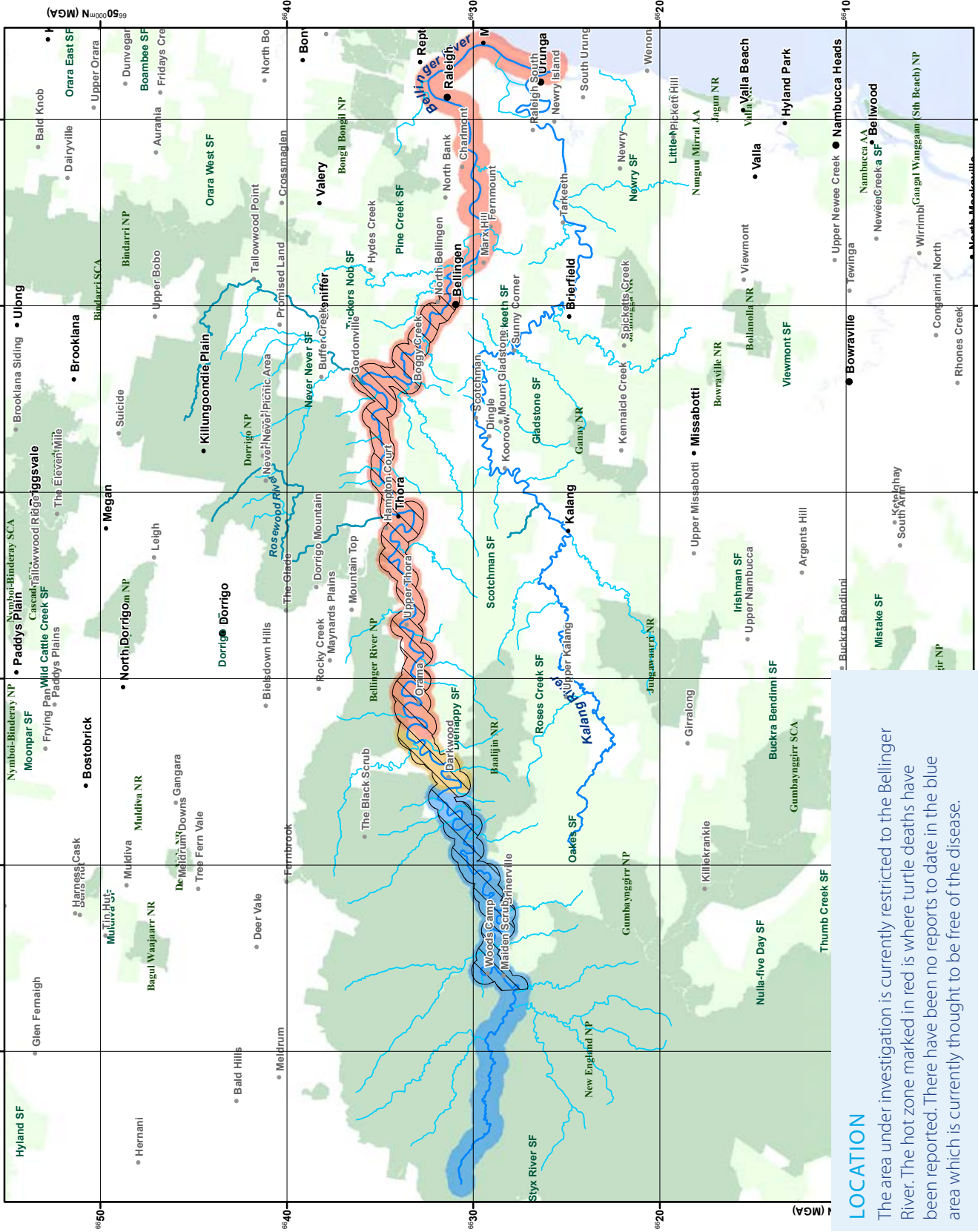
Map Details:

Base Data: © LPI, SPOT, AAM, SKM, OEH, Sensis, Katton
Map Projection: GDA 1984 MGA Zone 56
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KEY MAP



LOCATION

The area under investigation is currently restricted to the Belling River. The hot zone marked in red is where turtle deaths have been reported. There have been no reports to date in the blue area which is currently thought to be free of the disease.