

16 August 2023

***Sea Monsters* set to dive into Museum of tropical Queensland this Spring**

Move over jaws, this summer there are new ocean predators in town and they are taking up residence at Museum of Tropical Queensland as part of *Sea Monsters: Prehistoric Ocean Predators* exhibition which opens, Saturday 16 September.

While dinosaurs ruled the land, the depths of the oceans were home to some of the largest, fiercest and most successful predators including ichthyosaurs, plesiosaurs and mosasaurs.

Visitors will have the opportunity to come explore underwater life and come face to face with these sea monsters featuring more than 70 exhibits and include fossils from Queensland Museum's Collection.

Queensland Museum Network CEO Dr Jim Thompson said the exhibition was created in consultation with one of the world's leading sea monster experts, Queensland Museum palaeontologist Dr Espen Knutsen and gives an insight into the lives of those who ruled the oceans millions of years ago.

"Providing a mix of impressive full-sized and scaled replicas and real fossils, *Sea Monsters* will definitely make a splash with visitors of all ages this Summer," Dr Thompson said.

"In addition to the exhibition, visitors can experience a jam-packed school holiday program and events including our popular After Dark for adults and Night at the Museum for families."

Featuring never-before-seen real fossils from millions of years ago, gigantic life-sized casts from real specimens and immersive multimedia, *Sea Monsters* brings to life the marine predators of the past and showcases some of the predators and creatures that now rule the oceans.

Minister for the Arts Leeanne Enoch said visitors to *Sea Monsters* exhibition will step back in time for a rare glimpse of just some of the marine predators that once called this unique environment home.

"Queensland is known as the dinosaur capital of Australia and the most biodiverse state in the country. Our vast outback was previously part of an ancient inland sea and home to some of the largest, fiercest and most successful predators." Minister Enoch said.

"This exhibition is a wonderful way to engage with the State Collection which features a number of items on display for the very first time.

"One such *Sea Monster* is a huge 1.4 metre Kronosaurus jaw from a reptile reaching at least 9 metres which was found at Richmond in Queensland," Minister Enoch said.

Other specimens on display include a 13-metre-long elamosaurid (a plesiosaur from North America) and 9-metre-long *Prognathodon* (mosasaur).

Queensland Museum palaeontologist Dr Espen Knutsen said it was a privilege to be able to assist in the curation of *Sea Monsters*.

“Quite often our prehistoric marine reptiles are over-shadowed by dinosaurs and I am excited to be able to share some of my research with visitors to showcase just how ferocious these ancient marine predators were,” Dr Knutsen said.

The exhibition is supported by BHP through their Project DIG partnership with Queensland Museum, to digitally unlock knowledge held in the State Collection for visitors and researchers worldwide.

Elsabe Muller, Asset President of BHP Mitsui Coal (BMC) said insights into the past, allows scientists to better understand the present.

“Through Project DIG, BHP has been supporting Queensland Museum palaeontologists in their work in utilising digital technologies to help find answers surrounding the life and extinction of the prehistoric giants who once called Queensland home,” Ms Muller said.

Sea Monsters is an Australian National Maritime Museum touring exhibition, developed in partnership with Queensland Museum Network, presented in Brisbane with support from BHP as part of Project DIG.

As part of the exhibition visitors have the chance to win a family holiday including flights and accommodation to Brisbane for a private tour behind the scenes at Museum of Tropical Queensland with Dr Espen Knutsen.

The first Night at the Museum will be held on Saturday 23 September from 5.30pm. Tickets are limited and cost from \$17.

Tickets are now on sale for the exhibition which runs from 16 September 2023 – 28 January 2023.

For more information visit museum.qld.gov.au/tropicalqld

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Sea Monster Facts

1. Like whales, marine reptiles originally evolved on land and then went back to the sea
2. The biggest marine reptile was the 24m *Shonisaurus*, a type of ichthyosaur
3. Australia’s top plesiosaur predator, the *Kronosaurus* had a bite force of 3 tonnes – more than a saltwater crocodile.
4. The mosasaur *Prognathodon*’s head was so heavy; if it had lived on land, it couldn’t have lifted it.
5. We found the first sea monster fossils about 50 years before we found any dinosaurs - we’ve known about them for around 250 years.
6. Sea monsters ruled the oceans for over 180 million years (modern human have only been around for about 300,000 years).
7. Some ichthyosaurs could swim at speeds of 40 kilometres per hour.
8. Some Australian sea monster fossils have become stunning and valuable opals.
9. We can learn about what sea monsters ate by looking at their fossilised poo and stomach content, called coprolites and gastrolites.
10. The plesiosaur *Albertonectes* had 72 neck vertebrae – more than any other animal. We have only seven.