

**MEDIA RELEASE****UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL FRIDAY 6 DECEMBER**

## Seahorse breeding project aims to recover endangered species from near extinction

*SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium leads a unique breeding project designed to save the native White's Seahorse species*



Highlights video can be found [here](#)

High res photos can be found [here](#)

Video of a Male White's Seahorse giving birth can be found [here](#)

**SYDNEY, Friday 6th December 2019:** Following a dramatic decline in numbers over the past decade, White's Seahorse, also known as the Sydney Seahorse, has recently been listed as an 'Endangered' species in NSW. It is now Australia's only threatened Seahorse species and the second Endangered Seahorse species worldwide.

To help recover declining populations, SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium is implementing an exciting new breeding and conservation project in collaboration with a suite of organisations including the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Fisheries and the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) who are their two main partners. The project aims to successfully breed, raise, and release White's Seahorse back into the wild and monitor their success in helping reverse the decline of this iconic Endangered species.

Robbie McCracken, Aquarist and Seahorse Expert at SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium is leading the project and commented, "I'm thrilled with the progress of the breeding project to date. White's Seahorse is an interesting animal and sadly, largely due to natural habitat loss, this species is now classified as Endangered.

"For the past six months, we have worked closely with experts from DPI Fisheries and UTS to plan this project which kicked off last month when we collected breeding pairs from Sydney Harbour. This included some pregnant males and we're delighted to confirm that we've already witnessed six births.

"A large number of these babies are now on display in the new, custom built facility we have created at SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium. The facility will accommodate the growing juveniles prior to their release back into the wild and enable visitors to the Aquarium to witness first-hand how incredible these creatures are.

"A really unique fact about Seahorses is that it's the males that give birth and it's a really amazing sight. Dozens of babies shoot from the pouch in one go, it's very dramatic! We're now in the process of raising these babies so that they are fit and strong before marking them and releasing into the wild next year," added Robbie.

The long-term aim is to support the overall recovery of the species with the installation of 'Seahorse Hotels' in Sydney Harbour which will encourage the recovery and ongoing breeding of White's Seahorse given so much of their natural seagrass, sponge and soft coral habitat has disappeared.



Department of  
Primary Industries



Dr. David Harasti, Senior Marine Scientist with DPI Fisheries, has over a decade of experience working with Seahorses and will oversee the release and follow-up and said, “One of the key aspects of this project is that we will be implementing a monitoring program to assess how the babies go once they are released back into the wild. This will involve lots of diving surveys at the Seahorse release sites to assess their growth, survival and if they start breeding in the wild. The installation of the Seahorse Hotels will also provide a new home for the Seahorses within Sydney Harbour and we will closely monitor how this conservation tool helps the species to recover”.

DPI Threatened Species Fisheries Manager, Jillian Keating is also thrilled with the project’s progress and commented, “We are on the front-foot with implementing real recovery actions for this newly listed species. There’s so much enthusiasm and expertise being poured into this collaborative project”

Jillian has also coordinated the behind-the-scenes environmental assessment and permitting for this project to ensure the wild seahorse population remains secure and to gain support for the Seahorse Hotel installation, which Transport for NSW has been very cooperative in providing.

To help support the husbandry of the Seahorses and the long-term research, Dr. David Booth, Professor of Marine Ecology at UTS is supervising two Marine Biology Masters Research students who are assisting with the onsite care and monitoring of the Seahorses. Next year, the students will also have the opportunity to dive and check on the progress of the newly released seahorses back in the wild.

Professor Booth added, “We were excited to be invited to work on this important project and I’m thrilled to have two fantastic Masters Research students that can support the project and contribute to the recovery of the beautiful Sydney Seahorses as a long-term initiative.”

### **Seahorse Hotels**

Following the healthy birth of many juvenile White’s Seahorses, Robbie and the project team are now ready for the next phase of the project – constructing the Seahorse Hotels this month.

Inspired by discarded crab traps, Seahorse Hotels were trialled in Port Stephens in 2018 and 2019 and were found to be very successful in attracting Seahorses which led to mating and breeding.

These Seahorse Hotels start as artificial habitats that grow into natural habitats once they are placed in the marine environment. Over time they are grown over by sponges, algae and animals that colonise these structures, making them the perfect home for Seahorses. Seahorse Hotels will continue to be constructed over the next few months and placed in Sydney Harbour early in 2020, ahead of the release of the juveniles raised in SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium.

The SEA LIFE Trust’s ‘Ocean Youth’ are helping with the Seahorse Hotel construction, along with Seadragon Diving Co. and Sydney-based Indigenous Sea Rangers with support from DPI’s Marine Estate Management Strategy (MEMS).

### **White’s Seahorse also known as the Sydney Seahorse**

The species was named after John White, Surgeon General to the First Fleet and is endemic to the east coast of Australia. White’s Seahorses can be found in a variety of colours and they actually can change their colour to match what they are living on.

To find out more about the White’s Seahorse, visit the NSW DPI website:

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/species-protection/what-current/endangered-species/whites-seahorse>

For more information on the Seahorse Project or to secure tickets to SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium, visit:

<https://www.sydneyaquarium.com.au/>



Department of  
Primary Industries



- ENDS -

For more information, contact: Rachel Anker Group PR Manager at SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium,  
[rachel.anker@merlinentertainments.com.au](mailto:rachel.anker@merlinentertainments.com.au) | 0404 677 020

#### **About Merlin Entertainments**

Merlin Entertainments is a global leader in location-based, family entertainment. As Europe's Number 1 and the world's second-largest visitor attraction operator, Merlin now operates 130 attractions, 20 hotels and 6 holiday villages in 25 countries and across 4 continents. Merlin's purpose is to deliver memorable experiences to its 67 million guests around the world, through its iconic brands and multiple attraction formats, and the commitment and passion of its c28,000 employees (peak season).

#### **About DPI**

The NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) works to increase the value of primary industries and drive economic growth across NSW.

DPI Fisheries supports economic growth and sustainable access to aquatic resources through commercial and recreational fisheries management, research, aquaculture development, threatened species and habitat protection and rehabilitation, regulation and compliance. The division mitigates and manages risks from use of land and water, including from sharks and hunting through the Game Licensing Unit.

#### **About UTS**

**The University of Technology Sydney (UTS)**, located in central Sydney, is one of Australia's leading universities of technology. It is known for fusing innovation, creativity and technology in its teaching and research and for being an industry-focused university. UTS has a total enrolment of over 40,000 students and is rated No.1 'young' university in Australia in both the QS and Times Higher Education rankings. For more information go to [uts.edu.au](http://uts.edu.au).