

MEDIA RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Five-Star Seahorse Hotels launched in prime harbour location!

Nine Seahorse Hotels have been placed in Sydney Harbour to provide homes for some of Sydney's most precious and endangered residents - the White's Seahorse



A link to high res images and footage (will be captured on the day and shared here)

SYDNEY, Friday 6th March 2020: Today, nine Seahorse Hotels were placed underwater in Clifton Gardens, Mosman. These new hotels will house a soon-to-be-released colony of White's Seahorse from SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium as part of an important breeding and recovery project led by the Aquarium in collaboration with the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Fisheries and the University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

Since establishing a custom-built Seahorse breeding facility at SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium in late 2019, dozens of White's Seahorses also known as 'Sydney Seahorse,' have been successfully bred and are growing well. In the next two months, the juveniles will be tagged and released into Sydney Harbour as part of an important conservation project aiming to help recover this iconic Endangered species.

The decline in White's Seahorse is largely due to habitat loss and degradation which means that providing new artificial habitats is a key element in the recovery program. Seahorse Hotels are inspired by discarded crab traps and were originally trialled in Port Stephens in 2018 and 2019, where they were found to be very successful in attracting seahorses which led to mating and breeding.

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 corals, sponges, algae and encrusting animals that colonise these structures providing protection from predators and a ready supply of food and making them the perfect home for Seahorses. Seahorse Hotels are designed to be completely biodegradable, so the artificial structures will slowly collapse over time under the weight of the marine growth leaving a new natural habitat behind.

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 project so far. Since our collection in October, we have successfully bred dozens of White's Seahorses and they're doing really well. They're now fit and strong and we're excited to start planning their release.



Department of
Primary Industries



“While breeding is important, today was a significant milestone in the recovery program as it’s important that our seahorses have the right environment to flourish in once they’re released into the wild. With the help of DPI Fisheries, Ocean Youth, The Indigenous Sea Rangers (Gamay Rangers), Transport for NSW and The University of Technology Sydney (UTS), we’ve worked hard to build nine Seahorse Hotels and I was delighted to see them successfully placed within Clifton Gardens today.

Dr. David Harasti, Senior Marine Scientist with DPI Fisheries, has over a decade of experience working with seahorses and will oversee the release and monitoring and said, “We’re well and truly on track to tag and release our baby seahorses into Sydney Harbour in the next couple of months. After the release, we’ll be conducting regular diving surveys to monitor their growth, survival and breeding in the wild. This monitoring program is critical for assessing how the Seahorse Hotels, as a conservation tool, helps the species to recover.”

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.

Following a dramatic decline in numbers over the past decade, White’s Seahorse (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.

For more information on the Seahorse Project or to secure tickets to visit the baby seahorses that are currently on display in the Seahorse Breeding lab at SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium, visit: <https://www.sydneyaquarium.com.au/>

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>

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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.

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.