

Media release

8 November 2022

Latex Maugean Skate arrives just in time to help SKATEx artists

As part of the Australian Government-funded Maugean Skate Awareness Project, Cradle Coast Natural Resource Management (CCNRM) commissioned specialist wildlife sculptor Tim Johnman to create a life-sized model of one of Tasmania's lesser-known endangered species, the Maugean Skate. This ancient-looking fish, now found only in Macquarie Harbour on Tasmania's rugged west coast, is the subject of the inaugural Skate Exhibition (SKATEx) hosted by CCNRM which will be held in Strahan early next year.

"One of the reasons why Tasmania's largest endemic fish isn't better known is that it lives in dark tannin-stained water and often buries itself on the muddy floor of Macquarie Harbour. Only a handful of intrepid divers, dedicated researchers and regular fishers have ever seen this fascinating creature face-to-face. This means that clear quality photos of this animal in the wild are in very short supply. We thought that creating a mould to make some 3-D latex skates would help make the animal more accessible to a broad range of people, especially any artists who might be entering SKATEx," said Project Coordinator Ben Correy.

"The creation of the latex skate has been an interesting journey. Obtaining a specimen of this endangered species for Tim to work from was out of the question. Initially we contacted the CSIRO's Australian National Fish Collection, but they weren't able to loan us a pickled specimen as they only have a handful which must be kept in solution and are part of an immensely valuable scientific collection. The CSIRO staff were incredibly helpful and shared all the images of their specimens and even some x-rays which helped get our sculptor going. Tim was also assisted by the researchers from the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) who kindly provided their own photos and advice. This was one of Tim's most challenging animals and he was assisted by seasoned skate researcher Dr David Moreno who generously provided regular video phone hook-ups to make sure that he would get it right," said Ben.

"This skate is interesting for many reasons, including the fact that it shares many characteristics of the deep-sea skates as the darkened waters of Macquarie Harbour are similar to the low light levels of the deep ocean. This ancient Gondwanan relict fish is almost dinosaur-like; it is certainly another one of Tassie's iconic species. It is as important as a species as the critically endangered Wollemi Pine or Dinosaur Tree which grows in a deep secluded canyon in the Blue Mountains

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World Heritage Area, not far north from Tim's studio in Lithgow, NSW, where the latex model skate was created.

This project is a massive collaboration between a whole host of stakeholders (or 'skateholders' as we refer to them!) including the West Coast Recreational Association who have already done an immense amount of work educating recreational fishers about the easiest ways of identifying Maugean Skates, how to handle them carefully by the snout and to release them immediately if they are inadvertently caught using an engaging cartoon character named 'Spikey'. In recognition of this important work we have called the latex version 'Spike' in reference to the thorns on the body and tail, which are formidable-looking but are not venomous. 'Spike' will soon be joined by a female latex skate as well as some uniquely shaped skate egg cases which are in production right now.

One of the key aims of this project is to use the combined power of scientific knowledge and art to encourage people to learn more about the Maugean Skate and how it has become one of Australia's most endangered species. Cradle Coast NRM have launched a webpage which is dedicated to the Maugean Skate and includes an image library as well as links to other informative sites. We will post regular project updates on the webpage, and you can also follow on the NRM Facebook page.

All entries for SKATEx must be in by 3pm Monday 19th December and artists may submit their works at one of four locations around Tasmania or post them to Cradle Coast Authority. For more information <https://bit.ly/Skateproject>

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Photo caption: Endangered Maugean Skate replica pictured with a Wollemi Pine growing in Burnie Credit: CCNRM



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