



Groundbreaking ichthyosaur discovery unearthed in western Queensland

Australia's most complete ichthyosaur fossil set to reshape marine reptile research

- Near-complete 7.1m-long ichthyosaur skeleton discovered 100km south of McKinlay in Outback Queensland.
- Fossil believed to be the most complete ichthyosaur ever found in Australia, estimated at around 90% complete.
- Preparation will soon commence at the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History to enable scientific research and exhibition.
- Discovery highlights the rich palaeontological heritage of western Queensland and advances scientific understanding of Australia's Cretaceous seas.

The Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History in Outback Queensland is excited to announce the discovery of Australia's most complete ichthyosaur fossil. Located 100km south of McKinlay, in western Queensland, this extraordinary specimen, likely of the species *Platypterygius australis*, is exquisitely preserved and measures over seven metres in length. The near-complete and articulated skeleton offers a unique opportunity to study the growth and body dimensions of *P. australis* and the role it played as a dominant predator in the inland sea that inundated much of western Queensland around 100 million years ago.

The discovery was made on Toolebuc Station by neighbouring property owner and fossil enthusiast Cassandra Prince when fossicking in 2023. The specimen was carefully excavated the following year by Cassandra and her family. Remarkably well-preserved, the skeleton includes a complete vertebral column, intact left flipper, partial right flipper, rare hind flippers, partial tail fin and nearly complete skull and torso – making it one of the most scientifically valuable marine reptile fossils in Australia.

Museum Founders David and Judy Elliott assisted Cassandra and her family with collecting the specimen, which was subsequently transported to the Museum so that its preparation can commence. Generously donated to Australian Age of Dinosaurs by Toolebuc owner Sam Daniels and his family, this specimen represents a significant addition to the Museum's collection. Preparation will begin in September, with a volunteer-driven workshop planned over summer, aiming for completion by mid-2026. The ichthyosaur will then be mounted for exhibition in the planned Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History.

"This find is a huge win for science and public exhibitions in Australia," said David Elliott OAM, co-founder of the Museum. "Its discovery is testament to the dedication and expertise of Cassandra and her fossil-hunting family and the unique geological heritage of the region. We look forward to sharing this incredible piece of Australia's prehistory with visitors for generations to come."

"This specimen is yet another example of the incredible palaeontological resource that is regional Queensland" said Dr Espen Knutsen, Senior Scientist and Curator Palaeontology with the Queensland Museum Tropics in Townsville. "Such fossils are not only crucial for improving our understanding of extinct species and ancient ecosystems, but are also excellent ambassadors for Australia's natural heritage and increasing public interest in palaeontology and STEM subjects."

With an estimated 90% of the skeleton intact, this discovery is particularly significant, as most previous Australian ichthyosaur fossils have been incomplete. The find rivals other notable marine reptile discoveries, including a 1989 polycotylid plesiosaur from Richmond and a near-complete plesiosaur found on Cassandra's family property in 2022.

The discovery will play an important role in the ongoing mission of the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History, inspiring people about the Australian continent's prehistoric past through remarkable fossil discoveries and immersive educational experiences.