

Media Release

The Hon Danny Pearson MP
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PREHISTORIC MONSTER “CROC” OUR NEW STATE FOSSIL EMBLEM

A prehistoric monster amphibian that looked like a crocodile and was the size of a car has joined the likes of the Leadbeater’s possum, the helmeted honeyeater and gold as an official emblem of Victoria.

The four-metre *Koolasuchus cleelandi* had dozens of ridged fangs for piercing prey and two-inch tusks growing from the roof of its mouth – and following a public vote the predator is now Victoria’s State Fossil Emblem.

Minister for Creative Industries Danny Pearson said 11,500 Victorians voted in Museums Victoria’s poll to select the fossil emblem with *Koolasuchus cleelandi* beating other fossils unique to the state including a 25-million-year-old whale and one of the first plants to live outside water that dates back 400 million years.

Koolasuchus cleelandi, first discovered in 1978 near San Remo on Bunurong Country, is on permanent display at Melbourne Museum.

Fossils of *Koolasuchus* have only been found at beaches and coves in South Gippsland. Resembling something between a huge salamander and a crocodile, *Koolasuchus cleelandi* lived in the rushing rivers that separated Australia and Antarctica during the Cretaceous period.

Sharing the land with dinosaurs including the armoured ankylosaurus, the giant amphibian ate small dinosaurs, turtles and fish. Due to Victoria’s climate, the *Koolasuchus* was able to survive here for about 50 million years after all its relatives had died off, before eventually succumbing to extinction 125 million years ago.

The species was named after fossil collector and educator Michael Cleeland who in 1990 found the jaw that became the holotype of the species, and Melbourne Museum research associate Lesley Kool, who spent months preparing the specimens. *Koolasuchus* is also something of a play on words as the species lived in a cool environment when Victoria was deep in the southern polar circle.

The *Koolasuchus cleelandi* is part of Melbourne Museum’s *600 Million Years* exhibition that showcases the origin of life in Victoria through fossils, models, animatronics and animations. Entry to Melbourne Museum is free for children.

Victoria’s other state emblems are the Leadbeater’s Possum (animal), the Helmeted Honeyeater (bird), the Weedy Seadragon (marine animal), the Common Heath (flora), and gold (mineral).

Images and videos related to *Koolasuchus cleelandi* are available at tinyurl.com/3x7vwa7r.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Creative Industries Danny Pearson

*“While it might not be a creature you’d want to come across in the wild, the *Koolasuchus cleelandi* tells a fascinating story about Victoria’s history – and we welcome it as our official fossil emblem.”*

“It’s another reason why Melbourne Museum is such treasure and a great day out this summer.”

Quotes attributable to Museums Victoria chief executive Lynley Crosswell

*“*Koolasuchus cleelandi* is of global significance and it provides clues to the evolution of life on Earth and the past environments of Victoria.”*

“Museums Victoria is renowned for our paleontology collection with exceptional fossils from sites across Victoria. We display these fossils, research them and keep them safe for future generations to learn from.”

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