

# Media Release

**Steve Dimopoulos MP**  
Minister for Environment  
Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events  
Minister for Outdoor Recreation



Monday, 11 December 2023

## CRITICALLY ENDANGERED DRAGONS HATCH AT MELBOURNE ZOO

Tiny Victorian Grassland Earless Dragons have emerged from their eggs at Melbourne Zoo – the hatchlings are the result of a world first breeding program that could save the species from extinction.

Minister for Environment Steve Dimopoulos visited Melbourne Zoo today to welcome 26 hatchlings to the world, with more expected to hatch in the coming weeks.

These dragons are part of the first successful breeding program for the species which is made up of 16 male and 13 female dragons that were collected from the wild after their rediscovery earlier this year.

The new hatchlings are kept in climate-controlled conditions and cared for by a specialist keeper at the zoo before eventually being released back into their natural habitat.

The hatchling nursery and keeper were funded through a \$246,000 donation from American breakthrough genetic engineering and de-extinction company Colossal Biosciences.

The Victorian Grassland Earless Dragon is listed as Critically Endangered in Victoria and nationally. Before its rediscovery earlier this year, the species had not been seen for more than 50 years and was widely believed to be extinct. The recovery, breeding and protection of the dragon is essential to the survival of the species.

Other conservation efforts currently underway include development of a conservation plan, undertaking surveys in a bid to find new habitat and more populations, and genetics research to support further discoveries.

The Albanese and Allan Governments have invested \$188,000 towards specially trained detection dogs to sniff out more populations of the dragon.

Conservation efforts for this species are a collaboration between Zoos Victoria, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Museums Victoria, Wildlife Profiles Pty Lt and Wadawurrung Traditional Aboriginal Corporation.

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Environment Steve Dimopoulos

*“The hatching of these little dragons is the culmination of the hard work and persistence of Victorian environmentalists and scientists over many years.”*

*“These hatchlings are the first generation of Victorian grassland earless dragons born through a breeding program and are key to creating a thriving population into the future.”*

### Quote attributable to Zoos Victoria CEO Dr Jenny Gray

*“This first success is a small step on the road to fighting the extinction of this precious Victorian reptile, it’s incredible to see what has been achieved by the recovery team over the 10 months since the rediscovery of the species.”*

**Quotes attributable to Colossal CEO and co-Founder Ben Lamm**

*"Every time we can help save an animal or revive a species, we are delivering on our mission. Today as Zoos Victoria shares the news of the dragon hatchlings our entire team is celebrating."*

*"Colossal, in partnership with Zoos Victoria, is proving that when we combine next-generation science with a focus on animal stewardship we can protect and preserve the diverse and lost species of our planet."*