

Project: Terry: Weedy Sea Dragon (*Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*)

This piece began as a playful tribute to the weedy sea dragon- one of the most prized finds from my childhood beachcombing. It subsequently became the mascot for the *Discover Wildlife: Art and Science 2014* symposium and exhibition at CSIRO Discovery in Canberra (14- 18 May).

For many years during my childhood my answer to that typical adult question ‘what do you want to be when you grow up?’ was ‘a marine biologist’. I spent nearly every weekend fossicking on South Coast beaches with my family. We pored over marine books from the library. My parents encouraged this interest with gifts of books Steve Parish and Neville Coleman. I loved to fill in time on school holidays with visits to the local shell museum. One of my most exciting school days was the day that Jacques Cousteaux paid a visit to our French-speaking school. Perhaps unsurprisingly my own children inherited my love for the sea. It was they that requested this sculpture after reading many of my favourite sea life.

The idea finally came to fruition on a brief family holiday to Kiama where we stayed in a cabin overlooking the open ocean. I set myself up sculpting at the kitchen table with a dried specimen on hand.

After a couple of nights I was satisfied with the shape of Terry’s fascinating head. Since the uncured piece would not travel well, I cured it on the verandah using a portable oven I had brought with us. So Terry was born with gulls wheeling, whales breaching on the horizon and children playing happily in the sunshine.

The fish is endemic to Australian waters where it inhabits kelp or algae beds on coastal or offshore reefs between 6 and 50 metres in depth. Unlike similar species, *P. taeniolatus* does not have a prehensile tail with which to grasp and anchor itself. It swims with the aid of small pectoral fins behind the gill covers. Not being a strong swimmer, the fish is often stranded in stormy weather.

The story culminates with satisfaction on a number of levels. I was able to meet Steve Parish with my children at the symposium and share with him in person the generation-defying inspiration of his underwater photography. I wonder what they want to be when they grow up...?



Family holiday at Kiama



As children we were treated to museum visits where I was fascinated with pickled fish



Accepting a prize for ‘best innovative technique’ from Chrissie Goldrick, editor of National Geographic

