



Is it ok to stare at a sawfish?

PROJECT NAME: The impact and benefits of displaying endangered sawfish in public aquaria Reef HQ Aquarium will participate in surveys to measure the conservation benefits of displaying sawfish.

PROJECT DATES: July 2013 – July 2015.

PROJECT LEADER: Kate Buckley. Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Australia.

PROJECT FOCUS: In Australia, permits to collect and display species generally require justification in terms of educational or conservation benefits and sustainability of harvest. In this context, the critically endangered largetooth sawfish *Pristis pristis* is harvested for display in public aquaria. However, studies of its biology and ecology are rare and the impact of this harvest is unknown.

In the Northern Territory, public aquaria release harvested *P. pristis* back into the natural river system after some time in captivity, such releases are not permitted in Queensland. Until the survivorship and reintegration into the wild of released *P. pristis* is assessed, the impact of harvesting remains unknown. Likewise, the conservation benefits of displaying *P. pristis* has never been measured and this information is needed to assess the sustainability of harvesting for aquaria display.

PROJECT AIMS: This project aims to measure the impacts and benefits of harvesting sawfish for display in public aquaria by studying conservation benefits of displaying sawfish, through social surveys of aquarium staff and visitors and the ecological impacts of harvesting from the wild, by tracking captured and released individuals in the Adelaide River (NT) with acoustic tags. Movement patterns, activity levels and habitat use of sawfish individuals that have been released from aquaria will be compared to that of wild individuals to identify any potential ecological impacts.



Sawfish in Predator Exhibit at Reef HQ Aquarium. © Reef HQ Aquarium.

PROJECT OUTCOMES: This information will help species management decisions and achieve improved conservation outcomes for the sawfish. Sadly the team at Reef HQ Aquarium said goodbye to the sawfish in May 2014. The sawfish came to Reef HQ Aquarium in 2003 measuring 1.76m. The world class conditions the sawfish was kept under at Reef HQ Aquarium enabled her to grow to a whopping 3.3metres. The sawfish was in very good health and due to the exceptional conditions the sawfish was kept under, the likelihood of the sawfish growing to full capacity was high. Reef HQ Aquarium has made the proactive decision to relocate the sawfish to a larger aquarium where she can continue to thrive.

