



# MEDIA RELEASE

**The Hon Peter Garrett MP**

*Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts*

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## **PRICELESS HISTORY PROTECTED AS FOSSILS RETURNED TO CHINA**

A mammoth 750 kilograms of illegally imported dinosaur, mammal and reptile fossils seized by Australian officials over the past two years were today returned to the Chinese Government.

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, handed the fossils back to His Excellency Mr Zhang Junsai, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China, at a ceremony in Canberra.

"These fossils from provinces across China are of incredible cultural and scientific value to the People's Republic and to the world," Mr Garrett said.

"They are national treasures that tell a fascinating story about different geological periods as well as ancient environments.

"Some are believed to be up to 450 million years old, and are valued up to \$100,000. However the rarest are considered priceless because of their value to China's scientific and cultural heritage.

"They range from several types of dinosaur eggs to marine reptiles, fish and crustaceans.

"They will be sent back to China for preservation and research, to ensure they are protected for future generations."

The fossils were seized between 2004 and 2007 under the Australian Government's *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*, in a number of joint operations by the Australian Federal Police and the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. The most recent seizure took place in November 2007.

"Australia is committed to deterring international trade in artifacts and fossils, and we have been delighted to work with the Chinese Government to return these illegal imports", Mr Garrett said.

"These successful operations send a strong message around the world that Australia will not tolerate illicit trade in cultural heritage objects.

"We all have a responsibility to care for objects that help us understand our world and how it came to be, irrespective of the nation from which they originate."

This repatriation follows the return of 10,000 illegally imported Chinese fossils in September 2005. Other objects seized recently through the Act include 130 kilograms of dinosaur and plant fossils returned to the Argentine Republic in August 2007, 16 Dyak Skulls returned to Malaysia in May 2007, and an Asmat human skull from Papua returned to Indonesia in December 2006.

***For more information and high resolution images of the fossils visit  
[www.environment.gov.au/heritage](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage)***