

Parts of whale may be viewed by year's end

About 70% of work to preserve carcass found recently is already done, says museum

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SYMBOLIC SG50 GIFT

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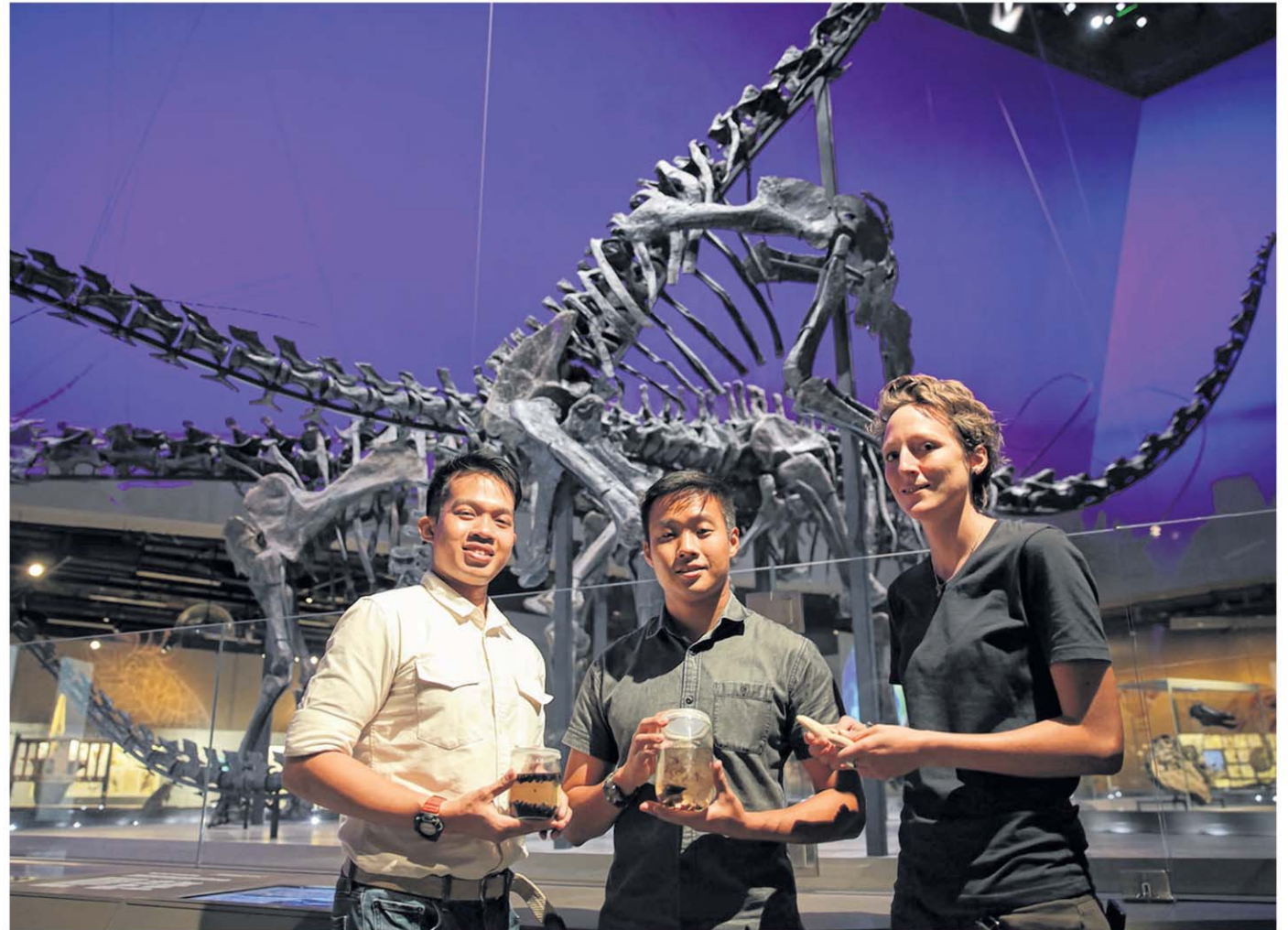


MR JOSEPH KOH, an honorary research affiliate of the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum

The work to preserve the sperm whale found recently in Singapore waters is underway – and parts of its skeleton could be on display by the end of the year.

“We plan on getting the whale skeleton ready for exhibition in 2016, but parts of the skeleton could be viewed by the end of this year,” the deputy head of the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, Professor Rudolf Meier, told *The Straits Times*.

An adult female sperm whale, 10.6m long and weighing between 8 and 10 tonnes, was found in Singapore waters for the first time on July 10. Since then, museum staff have been working almost every day to preserve its carcass by removing its flesh and collecting its tissues for further research.



(From left) Mr Foo Maosheng, Mr Marcus Chua, and Ms Kate Pocklington are part of the team putting together the female sperm whale's remains for the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum. The whale measures 10.6m long and weighed between 8 and 10 tonnes. ST PHOTO: YEO KAI WEN

Museum staff said that about 70 per cent of the work has already been done although oil has to be removed from the whale's bones, which must then be bleached before going on display.

“We are quite amazed at the work

that has been done so far but there is still a lot to be done,” said Mr Marcus Chua, curator of mammals and birds at the museum.

The whale carcass is still at the Tuas Marine Transfer Station next to the National Environment

Agency's Tuas Incinerator Plant but parts of its spine and shoulder blade were shown at a media briefing yesterday.

The museum now hopes to raise \$1 million towards setting up the whale exhibit and other areas, such as supporting related education and research efforts.

While \$46 million had earlier been raised for the museum, Prof Meier said additional funds are needed as the whale was not part of the original budget.

“The previously raised funds were used to build the new museum and the present gallery,” explained Prof Meier, who added that the museum wants the whale exhibit to be “impressive, ambitious and well done”.

“You may want to have interactive tools to allow kids to explore the inside of the sperm whale's body,” he added.

So far, a construction company and a couple have stepped forward to donate more than \$50,000 for the project.

Expand Construction, which is also the main contractor for the museum, is donating \$50,000, while Mr Joseph Koh, an honorary research affiliate of the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, and his wife, Mrs Koh Peifen, are donating a five figure sum.

Mr Koh said that he and his wife decided to donate to the cause in the hope that other Singaporeans will also pitch in.

He added: “This is our very own Singapore whale. If we can give the skeleton the pride of place at the new museum, it will be a highly symbolic SG50 gift from Singaporeans to the future generations of Singapore.”

Singapore got its first and only complete large whale carcass in 1892. The 13m-long baleen whale had been found beached in southern Malacca that year and its skeleton was subsequently displayed in the old Raffles Museum from 1907 to 1974.

It was then presented as a gift to Malaysia's Muzium Negara and is now housed in the Labuan Marine Museum off the coast of Sabah.

Sperm whales are the largest carnivorous animals on earth. They are regarded by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as vulnerable to extinction.

Ms Kate Pocklington, conservator at the museum who is also involved in efforts to preserve the whale, said: “We are lucky enough to be in this line of work where we can see these things... (We) feel small just standing next to it.”

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