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Grey Nurse shark research bolstered by new lab

State Government scientists working to save the Grey Nurse shark received a boost today when Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald opened a new state-of-the-art Aquatic Ecosystems Laboratory at Port Stephens.

Minister Macdonald officially opened the \$700,000 research centre today during a ceremony at the Port Stephens Fisheries Institute, a Centre of Excellence in Aquaculture and Aquatic Ecosystems.

“This significant investment assists in preserving the long-term sustainability of our valuable aquatic resources in NSW – and bolsters the campaign help save the critically endangered Grey Nurse shark,” Minister Macdonald said.

“The new laboratory is specially designed for shark work and will play a pivotal role in the Institute’s Grey Nurse Shark Breeding program.

“This includes the world-first technique that recently saw the successful transfer of late stage Wobbegong shark embryos into an artificial uterus and their subsequent ‘birth’ from the device.”

Funded under The State Government’s Towards 2020 Initiative other research activities to be undertaken at the new facility include:

- Studying the growth of seagrass, an important habitat for fish populations
- The investigation of small fish caught during field surveys conducted across important coastal wetlands, including the Blue Groper, the NSW State Fish

Minister Macdonald said in addition to the main laboratory, the new complex houses field sampling equipment, a large walk in freezer, an aquarium room with running saltwater and freshwater and an area for the dissection of large fish and sharks.

“It also features separate storage facilities for hazardous chemicals and will house the Institute’s impressive collection of alcohol-preserved biological samples that has been compiled over many years,” Minister Macdonald said.

“In addition to the new laboratory and storage areas, improvements will also be made to the existing Aquatic Ecosystems building, including refurbishment of an existing work area, upgrades to the security system and improved covered access and other internal modifications.”

Following the official opening Minister Macdonald assisted scientists ‘birthing’ the second trial of wobbegong shark embryos from the artificial uterus.

The second trial of the artificial uterus saw eight embryos transferred, at a much earlier stage of development than those in the first trial, and represents one of the very first uses of the new laboratory.
