Scientists claim dino find’s mini-me to a T

By Natasha Rudra

Scientists believe they have discovered Australia’s first tyrannosaur, a small dinosaur weighing about 80kg and standing about 2m tall.

The little tyrannosaur lived about 105 million years ago, well before the arrival of the “colossal” tyrannosaurs such as the T. rex.

But a Queensland dinosaur expert has cast doubt on the discovery, saying it is difficult to definitively identify the animal as a tyrannosaur.

In a study published in the journal *Science* today, a team including Australian researchers Tom Rich and Professor Pat Vickers-Rich say the tyrannosaur was identified through a pubis bone in a 21-year-old fossil.

Dr Rich, curator of vertebrate paleontology at Museum Victoria, said the bone was in a fossil first dug up in 1989 at Dinosaur Cove in Victoria.

But it wasn’t identified until last October, when Dr Rich took the fossil to a colleague at the Natural History Museum in London.

Dr Rich said this was the first dinosaur from the tyrannosaurid superfamily discovered in Australia. “Until now, we thought of tyrannosaurids as a northern hemisphere group but here we’ve got one in Australia. And you think hmmm, why haven’t we found more in Australia?” he said. “The hardest fossil is to find the first one. Once you know they’re there then you can sort of make plans.”

Dr Rich said the fossil record in the southern hemisphere was not as well preserved as the record in the north. “We have other carnivorous dinosaurs and what we’re finding is that we have an incredible variety of them in Victoria, it’s turned out to be one of the most diverse places on earth,” he said.

University of Queensland paleontologist Steve Salisbury said he believed the bone was not conclusive proof of an Australian tyrannosaur and lacked characteristics that definitively identified it as a tyrannosaur bone.