

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## **International astronomers gather in Hobart**

University of Tasmania Vice-Chancellor Professor Daryl Le Grew will next Monday (December 10) open the annual gathering of the international astronomical collaboration, PLANET, being held in Hobart.

UTAS astronomers from the School of Mathematics and Physics are part of PLANET (Probing Lensing Anomalies Network) which was established in 1995 and monitors, measures and analyses changes in star brightness due to gravitational microlensing events. These occur when one star passes directly in front of another. Analysis of these changes may lead to the discovery of a new planets orbiting about stars other than the sun.

This year, PLANET has been involved in the discovery of at least four exoplanetary systems (planets revolving about other stars). At least one of these is known to contain two planets. Last year, UTAS astronomers, in a separate collaboration, helped unearth another exoplanetary system that also contains two planets.

“After a slow start, microlensing is now making a vital contribution to the infant field of exoplanetary research,” said Dr John Greenhill, from the School of Mathematics and Physics.

“In a few years we should have a good idea of how planetary systems are formed and how many worlds, like our own, are out there. It is particularly gratifying that the University’s Mt Canopus Observatory is making such an important contribution to this exciting new field,” he said.

The Hobart gathering, the first in Tasmania since 1998, includes delegates from Europe, South Africa, USA and New Zealand and the head of PLANET, Dr Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, from Institut d'Astrophysique de Paris.

**For more information or to arrange interviews, please contact the Media Office.**

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