

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



UTAS to offer support, scholarships to Cat workers

The University of Tasmania will offer scholarships and specialist guidance to workers impacted by this week's announcement of job losses at Caterpillar's Burnie operation.

University Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Rathjen said the community faced a twofold challenge: to immediately support workers and families, along with strategically positioning the region onto a brighter, more sustainable footing.

Professor Rathjen this morning pledged significant university resources to both efforts, including the provision of highly skilled staff to help people onto new education and career pathways, scholarships and the prospect of hosting a key symposium to consider responses to the situation.

University Pro Vice-Chancellor (Regional Development) Professor Janelle Allison said that as a part of the community, UTAS was acutely aware of the impact this week's announcement would have in the tight-knit North-West region.

"Above all else, the University is concerned that as a community we quickly, meaningfully put in place processes to support the impacted workers and position them toward pathways to new futures," Professor Allison said.

"The University has been aware of challenges facing this region's manufacturing industries and has put considerable time and energy in recent years to shore up the sector and supply-chain network of companies which support it.

"We will continue to work where we see we can make a difference. However, we must also view this latest announcement by Caterpillar as part of a reasonably consistent pattern across traditional industries in the region, Tasmania and nation as a whole."

Professor Rathjen said the University would seek conversations with Caterpillar and other key stakeholders to ensure responses to the situation were co-ordinated.

"We think the university has a role to play in response to the Caterpillar announcement on a number of substantial levels," he said.

"One is in supporting impacted workers with advice, new skills and pathways to different futures.

“We have staff ready to do just that – whether it be at the Cradle Coast campus or the factory floor.

“Also, scholarships will be available for Cat workers to increase their skills in related fields, such as engineering, or to take different directions into areas such as health, rural industries or regional development.”

He said the University would help identify and create new industries in future fields, such as health, and also re-imagine more sustainable futures for traditional sectors such as manufacturing, forestry and agriculture.

“These industries will continue to play an important part in the Tasmanian economy, but they will look very different into the future than they have in the past. Research and education are going to be pivotal to securing Tasmania's economic cornerstones,” Professor Rathjen said.

Professor Rathjen said the suggested symposium would need to effectively do three things:

- examine the regional sustainability issues around Tasmania’s reliance on traditional industry;
- explore what different futures might possible for the North and North-West of the State; and
- ask what needs to be done to secure a more sustainable future for the region.

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