

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## **Donations deliver new research directions for Devil disease**

The latest funding round from the Save the Tasmanian Devil Appeal is focused on the perplexing immunology of Devil Facial Tumour Disease (DFTD) to help pin down a response to the deadly disease.

The failure of the Tasmanian devil's immune system to prevent DFTD from becoming established has so far baffled researchers.

The University of Tasmania and the University of Sydney will share \$54,000 Dr Eric Guiler Tasmanian Devil Research Grants funded by public donations, to further explore laboratory techniques and genetic studies aimed at unravelling the complex issue.

At UTAS, Dr Alex Kreiss and Associate Professor Greg Woods of the Menzies Research Institute received funding for further analysis of new laboratory techniques that will help find alternatives in immunisation against DFTD.

Dr Alex Kreiss said the project would also help determine which component of the Tasmanian devil's immune response could protect it against developing DFTD.

"Our model being developed will help us understand the underlying mechanisms of DFTD, how this tumour escapes the devil's immune system and, potentially, how it can be killed," he said.

"Through this new work we hope to screen the devil's response to a range of DFTD immunisation protocols."

Assoc/Prof Woods added "Any potential for a vaccine requires a number of models to be tested and this research will contribute towards this goal."

At the University of Sydney, Associate Professor Kathy Belov of the University of Sydney's Faculty of Veterinary Science has received \$30,000.

Assoc/Prof Belov is developing a comprehensive sequencing database of the entire Major Histocompatibility Complex genetic sequence of one potentially DFTD-resistant, and one infected devil.

This will help researchers design better measurements of genetic diversity in devils, so that potentially resistant animals in the wild and in captivity could be identified and managed.

Save the Tasmanian Devil Appeal Committee Chair, David Rowell, said the latest funding round was part of almost \$700,000 allocated in total by the Program, to support research and management programs.

“The generosity of the public has enabled researchers throughout Australia and across the world to continue their research and management programs to solve this perplexing disease,” Mr Rowell said.

Wild Tasmanian devils in the iconic Tasmanian wilderness are facing extinction through the ravages of Tasmanian Devil Facial Tumour Disease (DFTD), which has spread across 65% of Tasmania. The population of devils in the wild has fallen by more than 80% and the species is now on Australia’s Endangered Species list.

The Save the Tasmanian Devil Program (STDP) is Australia’s official national response to this rare disease, involving a partnership between the Australian Commonwealth Government, the Tasmanian State Government and the University of Tasmania, backed by the international conservation and wildlife management expert community. The Program is delivered through an international collaboration of research institutions, universities, wildlife parks and zoos in Australia and overseas.

The Save the Tasmanian Devil Appeal (STDA) is the formal fundraising arm of the STDP and is coordinated by the University of Tasmania.

For more information or to make donations to the Save the Tasmanian Devil Appeal, visit: [www.tassiedevil.com.au](http://www.tassiedevil.com.au)



An initiative of the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program coordinated by the University of Tasmania Foundation

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