

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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\$5 million for new UTAS centres a 'step change' in research

Two new research projects to be established at the University of Tasmania with \$5 million in Australian Government support are set to drive economic, social and environmental benefits for the state – and Australia.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Peter Rathjen, welcomed the announcement of the two initiatives, which underscore the leading role played by UTAS in the socio-economic revitalisation of Tasmania.

Prof Rathjen thanked the Independent Member for Denison, Andrew Wilkie, for championing the proposals with the Australian Government.

The \$5 million funding will be used to help fund the establishment of a national future forest industries centre and an experimental aquaculture facility. Industry support will be sought for the both proposals and funding will be matched by partner contributions.

“The research and outcomes delivered by these centres, with their respective strengths in forestry and aquaculture, will further reinforce this state’s reputation for innovation and collaboration, as well as highlighting Tasmania’s strong environmental credentials,” Prof Rathjen said.

“Tasmania is the ideal place to locate these research centres, given the island’s range of forestry and aquaculture industries that span the state. We also have a thriving – and growing – research community with one of the highest per-capita concentrations of scientists of any state or territory in Australia.”

The research to be undertaken by these two new centres will help the development of industries that are currently worth more than \$25 billion to the Australian economy.

“Tasmania is Australia’s largest producer of seafood, and salmon aquaculture delivers Australia’s highest value seafood product,” the Executive Director of the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS), Professor Mike Coffin, explained.

“The Tasmanian salmon industry alone employs directly or indirectly nearly 5,000 people. It is currently developing a strategy to double production by 2030. Major expansions are also planned for the oyster, abalone and mussel industries.

“Fulfilling these strategies sustainably, with minimal impact on the marine environment, requires significantly enhanced research capacity.”

The establishment of a controlled-environment experimental aquaculture facility would help meet that challenge. “This facility will build relationships between the University and other research and development organisations such as CSIRO, and industry,” Prof Coffin said.

The future of the forest and wood products sector in Australia is also full of promise and opportunity, but is currently undergoing substantial change – in international and domestic markets, resource ownership and reliance on production from plantations, among other factors.

“When it comes to forestry, we are all too aware here in Tasmania of the significant challenges Australia faces in terms of sustaining and growing a forest resource, and in increasing our international competitiveness,” the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Paddy Nixon, said.

“The research to be undertaken by the national future forest industries centre will help Tasmania and Australia realise value in a number of areas, including commercial gain for forest companies from improvements in yield and operational efficiency; the development of emerging enterprises in response to new economic opportunities and sustainability of livelihoods for regional communities.”

The Vice-Chancellor, Prof Rathjen, concluded: “Together these two research centres have the potential to make a step change in innovation and productivity in not only the Tasmanian economy, but also across the world.”

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