

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Donations support research grant into mystery DFTD cells

The latest funding round of the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program, is assisting medical researchers further their work to develop a vaccine against the Devil Facial Tumour Disease.

Four projects have shared in \$75,000 allocated by the Program, directly from contributions to the Save the Tasmanian Devil Appeal.

An international collaboration into understanding how DFTD cells escape the immune system, has received \$10,000 of the \$75,000 allocated.

Dr Hannah Siddle from the University of Sydney, is currently conducting tests from the Pathology Department at the University of Cambridge, to explore why the devil's immune system fails to recognise the tumour and mount an immune response.

Dr Siddle's research is being conducted in partnership with Professor Jim Kaufman from the University of Cambridge, Associate Professor Katherine Belov from the University of Sydney and Professor Greg Woods and Dr Alex Kreiss from the Menzies Research Institute at UTAS.

"We need to look at specialised immune molecules found on the outside of the tumour cells. If there is something wrong with these molecules or they are absent, this would explain why the devil immune system does not respond to the tumour," Dr Siddle said.

"We need to develop antibodies to recognise these molecules so we can then test all tumour cells.

"This study will markedly increase understanding of how DFTD spreads and progresses so rapidly within each devil.

"In addition, an understanding of molecules produced by DFTD cells may uncover potential antigens that could be used to develop a vaccine to the tumour."

Other funded projects are:

- UTAS School of Zoology, PhD student Rodrigo Hamede - understanding the basis of variant disease dynamics and population impacts of DFTD in the West Pencil Pine population (\$23,851), Dr Eric Guiler Grant;
- UTAS Menzies Research Institute, Dr Alex Kreiss – the expansion of a research quarantine facility (\$13,800), Dr Eric Guiler Grant; and

- UTAS Menzies Research Institute, PhD student Terry Pinfold- evaluation of DFTD immune response (\$26,250), Qantas Tasmanian Devil Research Scholarship.

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 across the world to continue their research and management programs to solve this perplexing disease,” Mr Rowell said.

The Save the Tasmanian Devil Appeal is administered by the University of Tasmania Foundation and is the formal fundraising arm of the Save the Tasmanian Devil program. UTAS, in partnership with the Australian and Tasmanian Government, launched the Save the Tasmanian Devil program and Appeal to oversee the response to the disease and raise funds for vital research. The aim of the program is to maintain the Tasmanian devil as an ecologically functional species in the wild.

For more information or to make donations to the Save the Tasmanian Devil Appeal, visit: www.tassiedevil.com.au



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