

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## Prime Minister inspects waterfront site of new marine and Antarctic research hub

The University of Tasmania played host to the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, today as she inspected the Hobart waterfront site of the new home of the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS).

Ms Gillard's visit to the site – which formerly housed the Princess Wharf 2 shed – comes less than a fortnight before construction is scheduled to start.

During her inspection the Prime Minister was shown plans for the facility by the University's Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Paddy Nixon, and the Executive Director of IMAS, Professor Mike Coffin.

“The new building will co-locate much of Tasmania's considerable strength in marine and Antarctic studies in one precinct, offering opportunities for collaborative research of state, national and international significance,” Prof Nixon said.

“As the historical and current departure point for Australia's Antarctic research expeditions, the Hobart wharf district is the ideal location for this leading research facility.”

The building, which will provide teaching and research facilities for about 290 staff and students, will have a gross floor area of more than 7,000 square metres over three levels. It has been designed to be flexible and adaptable and to foster internal and external public interaction.

“UTAS believes that locating the IMAS building on the waterfront will encourage community engagement with University activities,” Prof Nixon said.

“It will also provide an additional point of interest for visitors to the precinct. To this end, the publicly-accessible ground level will include a 100-seat auditorium and an exhibition space showcasing a range of marine and Antarctic displays.”

“IMAS is a world leader in Southern Ocean and Antarctic research,” Professor Coffin said.

“One of the most urgent questions is how polar areas are responding to rapid climate change. IMAS research programs are actively investigating the effects

of climate change on the chemistry, physics and biology of the Southern Ocean, the extent and duration of circum-Antarctic sea ice, and the size of the Antarctic ice sheet.

“Climate change is also affecting the number and distribution of Southern Ocean and Antarctic birds and animals such as penguins and seals. IMAS researchers are active in monitoring changes, identifying potential causes and predicting likely future effects.

“The related issue of ocean acidification will also have important consequences in the Southern Ocean, and IMAS scientists are investigating the impact on benthic (bottom-dwelling) invertebrates, sea-ice organisms and krill,” Prof Coffin said.

The \$45 million IMAS building project is an initiative of the Australian Government, funded under the Nation-building Economic Stimulus Plan.

The University has recently awarded the contract for Stage 2 (construction) of the IMAS building project to the John Holland Fairbrother Joint Venture.

Construction will begin on February 1 and is expected to take about 18 months, with the building being fully operational early in 2014.

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