

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

DATE: THURSDAY 5 AUGUST 2010

ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Tasmanian parasitic wasps to NZ rescue

A tiny Tasmanian parasitic wasp is going to be released by scientists in New Zealand in an attempt to tackle an Australian insect that's ravaging their eucalypt trees.

Dr Geoff Allen, a Senior Lecturer in Entomology from the UTAS School of Agricultural Science and the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research (TIAR), and his New Zealand research colleagues have received approval to use the parasitic wasp (*Cotesia urabae*) to combat the gum-leaf skeletoniser (*Uraba lugens*) - an Australian moth that has the potential to defoliate *Eucalyptus* plantations as well as ornamental *Eucalyptus* grown for shade and shelter throughout New Zealand.

"People get a bit nervous when you start talking about wasps because they usually think of the European wasp," Dr Allen said. "*But Cotesia urabae* is only about 3mm long and is harmless to humans.

"It's an effective control against the gum-leaf skeletoniser because the wasp lays its egg inside the caterpillar and, when ready to pupate, the larva eats its way out and kills the caterpillar."

Since 2003 Dr Allen has been working as a research advisor on an international biocontrol program (funded by New Zealand's Sustainable Farming Fund) to combat the gum-leaf skeletoniser in New Zealand.

An economic impact assessment conducted for New Zealand estimated the potential cost of the gum-leaf skeletoniser at NZ\$100–\$142 million. There is also a significant concern for public health from rashes resulting from contact with this insect.

Dr Allen's role involved consultation over the selection of potential biocontrol agents, the collection of biocontrol agents in Tasmania and interstate, rearing protocols for biological control agents and their hosts, and research on biocontrol agent specificity in Tasmania.

In late 2008 Dr Lisa Berndt, from the New Zealand forestry research organisation Scion, came to Tasmania to finalise key research needs prior to submission of the release application. Approval for next year's release was provided by the New Zealand Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA).

**For more information/interviews, please contact Dr Geoff Allen on (03) 6226 2732.
High definition photographs can also be provided.**

Information Released by:

UTAS Communications and Media, University of Tasmania

Phone: 6226 2124 Mobile: 0418 196 121

Email: Media.Office@utas.edu.au