

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Researcher in the depths of Antarctic winter

Survival of Antarctic ecosystems in the long, dark polar winter will be investigated by the University of Tasmania as a nationally-significant research project into global climate change.

The project (DP0880212) to determine the impact of increased water temperatures during the Antarctic winter primary production has received \$85,000 from the Australian Research Council.

The study will address the uniquely polar problem of what happens to marine plants in the dark when seawater temperature rises.

The research also aims to ensure sustainable fisheries and maximum biodiversity in the region including the growth of finfish and krill and also seal, penguin and whale stocks.

Chief investigator and Institute of Antarctic and Southern Ocean Studies Director Assoc Prof Andrew McMinn said despite almost 50 years of polar research, the biological processes in the polar region over winter was relatively unknown.

He said insights gained in Antarctica, an area currently facing rapid climate change, will result in better prediction and management of other effected ecosystems.

“It is widely assumed that because of the extreme cold and long periods of darkness in winter that the marine ecosystem goes into a state of prolonged suspended animation and then springs back to life with the melting of the sea ice and the return of the sun,” Assoc Prof McMinn said.

“In spite of almost 50 years of concerted polar research since the first permanent Antarctic bases were established in 1957, we still know remarkably little about biological processes occurring over winter.”

For interviews contact:

IASOS Director

Ass Prof Andrew McMinn

Ph: 6226 2980

Email: Andrew.McMinn@utas.edu.au

Information Released by:

The Media Office, University of Tasmania

Phone: 6226 2124 Mobile: 0417 517 291

Email: Media.Office@utas.edu.au