

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Tree study branches out across Australia

Urban trees may not seem like a contentious subject but as University of Tasmania researchers have discovered, everyone has an opinion.

Australia's changing urban tree estate is the subject of a three-year study by Professor Jamie Kirkpatrick and Dr Aidan Davison of the UTAS School of Geography and Environmental Studies.

The national study – which is outlined in the latest issue of *Research to Reality* - includes an assessment of changes in tree cover in parts of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Townsville, Hobart and Launceston, as well as interviews with urban land managers.

Some of the questions the researchers are trying to answer include: What influences private home-owner decisions to plant trees or remove them? What council-owned trees would they like to see in their streets? How the trees they choose or don't choose affects native wildlife, and what are the favourite types of tree planted and why?

“One puzzling thing to come out of the study was that while in the United States there are a large number of trees planted specifically for their shade, in eastern Australia, despite, on average, having a hotter and sunnier climate, comparatively few people thought about trees for their shade,” said Professor Kirkpatrick.

Trees – specifically coconut palm trees – are also the subject of a study by Professor Greg Nolan from the UTAS Centre for Sustainable Architecture in Launceston.

Assoc Prof Greg Nolan is trying to find a way to “peel” the palm stems for use as a timber veneer. The biggest challenge is developing a method of peeling the trunk like toilet paper off a roll, when they are dealing with a hard, dense outer shell and a soft centre.

The project, backed by a \$1.3 million Australian Research Council grant, is aimed at supporting support economic development in Pacific Island countries, particularly Fiji, Samoa and the Solomon Islands.

Other projects featured in the latest *Research to Reality* really get down to grassroots, none more so than a study led by Professor Sergey Shabala from the School of Agricultural Science, which is attempting to discover how plants can be adapted to thrive in salty soil and on salt water.

“The point is we cannot cope with the number of hungry people there will be and we have to move from growing crops on the existing lands to more marginal lands, which are traditionally not really suitable for agriculture,” Prof Shabala said.

Edition 12 of *Research to Reality* will be launched at the Newnham campus tonight (Wednesday June 20) by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Peter Rathjen, as part of a Research Week event hosted by the Launceston Chamber of Commerce.

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