

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Scholarship gives UTAS student chance to be part of devil disease solution

Research into the Devil Facial Tumour Disease (DFTD) has been boosted by Tasmanian privately-owned property rent management business Nekon Pty Ltd, with a generous \$30,000 donation to the Save the Tasmanian Devil Appeal.

The donation will fund the Tasmanian Devil Elite Scholarship which has been awarded to UTAS PhD candidate Ruth Pye, from Brisbane.

It covers three-and-a-half years of study with UTAS' Menzies Research Institute in Hobart under the supervision of Professor Greg Woods.

Ruth has a Bachelor of Veterinary Science from the University of Queensland and a Masters of Veterinary Conservation Medicine from Murdoch University in Perth, WA.

Her research for her PhD will concentrate on developing strategies to produce an effective vaccine to protect Tasmanian Devils against DFTD, which, given recent breakthroughs into understanding how the disease operates, could be achievable in the near future.

For the past five years Ruth has been in India managing a street dog sterilisation/rabies vaccination program.

Many of the dogs had Canine Transmissible Venereal Tumour (CTVT) and her tumour samples were sent to Dr Liz Murchison – a Tasmanian geneticist who is studying both CTVT and DFTD at King's College, Cambridge, UK and collaborating with the Menzies devil research group.

CTVT and DFTD are the only two transmissible tumours known to exist in the world.

“I am really grateful for the scholarship and the opportunity it has given me to study DFTD, and to contribute to the fascinating research being undertaken by the Menzies Institute,” Ruth said.

“A deep understanding of the devils' immune response to the tumour, and the characteristics of the tumour itself is essential for reaching the goal of a DFTD vaccine.”

Nekon director Vicky Rockefeller said that her company is committed to supporting the Tasmanian community across the fields of the arts, community organisations, health and education and the environment, including the Premier's Arts Partnership Fund, the Heart Foundation's Jump Rope for Heart, the Tasmanian Theatre Co. and the Royal Hobart Hospital.

“Nekon has selected the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program Appeal for its support of education and the environment and we are delighted that our contribution will go towards the Tasmanian Devil Elite Scholarship program,” she said.

“We wanted to support something that is directly related to Tasmania and it's wonderful to be able to help an individual, and support such a worthy cause, and hopefully the payback for us will be to see a good outcome for the devils.”

Today (Wednesday 13 March 2013), Vicky will have the opportunity to meet Ruth and find out about her goals as well as tour the devil research facilities at Menzies.

Appeal manager Rebecca Cuthill said that Nekon's donation is significant in that one donor has decided to support key vaccine research.

“The Appeal funds a range of research and management projects from donations it receives from the public and this donation sends the positive message to students that their research is important,” she said.

“We are very grateful that Nekon director Vicky Rockefeller has embraced the cause to support our Tasmanian devil and the fight to find a cure for DFTD.”

Nekon manages six Plaza shopping centres and several buildings in Hobart and one Plaza shopping centre in Launceston.

**For more information or to organise an interview, please contact
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