

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Cedric still provides information into devil disease

The Tasmanian devil known as Cedric is still providing insight into the contagious cancer threatening the species, University of Tasmania researchers say.

Associate Professor of Cancer and Immunology, Greg Woods, from the University's Menzies Research Institute, today released the outcome of laboratory tests which support a preliminary diagnosis that Cedric had developed Devil Facial Tumour Disease.

Senior Scientist with the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program, Professor Hamish McCallum, from the UTAS School of Zoology, said the laboratory results were not a major setback for DFTD research overall.

Prof McCallum said Cedric's story was indicative of the need for continued public support to further explore DFTD which could not rely solely on one devil.

"Cedric continues to be important for developing our understanding about the immune response to the disease," he said.

"However, one devil was never going to save the entire species. We need to investigate the immune response to the disease in more animals, both in the laboratory and in the field, if we are to crack this disease.

"It is now critical that we have ongoing support to build on what we know about Cedric and to continue a range of programs under way as part of the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program."

Assoc Prof Woods said he removed two tumours, each about the size of a pea, were surgically removed and two months later Cedric has no detectable signs of DFTD.

"Cedric will be monitored regularly to confirm that the surgery was successful and that the disease does not return. He will also play an important role in determining whether his immune response can be further boosted against DFTD," he said.

Assoc Prof Woods said the results from the Department of Primary Industries and Water's Mt Pleasant Laboratories established that the DFTD strain that produced the tumour was from the second injection of live tumour cells, which occurred nine months after the final vaccination.

"From one devil we can only assume that the vaccine induced a temporary protection. We need to know more about the biology of these tumours," he said.

He said the next phase of research would involve trials aimed at inducing a longer protection period.

Save the Tasmanian Devil Program Manager, Andrew Sharman, said the results highlight the complexity of the disease.

“The research into the disease has shown that we are dealing with an evolving disease with DFTD, which means there are no single, simple solutions and the results obtained in this aspect of the research further confirm that,” Mr Sharman said.

“What we know is the key to tackling a disease such as this is breaking the transmission cycle and that is the key area we are focussed on in all of our approaches.”

For more information or to make a donation to the Save the Tasmanian Devil Appeal, visit: www.tassiedevil.com.au

*** Associate Professor Greg Woods can be contacted for interviews today on 6226 4832 between 10.30am and 12pm.**

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