

# MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## 6<sup>th</sup> International Penguin Conference opens in Hobart next week

Penguins are barometers to the health of the planet, say some of the world's leading conservation scientists who will gather in Hobart next week for the 6<sup>th</sup> International Penguin Conference.

The conference will be hosted by the University of Tasmania from Monday September 3 to 7.

Around 180 delegates from Australasia, Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas will present their research findings on the planet's 17 species of penguins, 12 of which are on the IUCN- World Conservation Red List of Threatened Species.

The five keynote speakers will speak each morning at 9am, while there are 56 oral presentations and almost 100 poster sessions.

"The conference is an international drawcard, bringing together research managers, and policy makers from around the world to discuss current and emerging conservation issues affecting penguins," said bird ecologist and conference convenor Dr Eric Woehler.

Dr Woehler said penguins were facing significant threats from oil spills, coastal development resulting in loss of habitat, predation of dogs, competition for resources and loss of food from commercial fishing activities.

"Penguins are the bell wether of climate change. As birds they are pretty much at the top of the food chain. They act as natural bio-indicators and signal the health of their environments, both marine and terrestrial," said Dr Woehler.

The keynote speakers will talk on foraging ecology, conservation management, physiology and demography and behaviour.

### Conference highlights include:

- **Free public lecture** by US conservationist **Dr Susie Ellis**, who has worked with penguins for more than a decade in her roles with the IUCN and Conservation International. Her presentation, *What's the conservation status of the world's penguins?* will be held on Thursday 6 September at 7pm at the Stanley Burbury Lecture Theatre.

- **Little Penguin workshop: Wednesday 1.30pm-4.30pm.** This workshop sees a number of key pieces of research released and discussed including:

**Tamar Valley Pulp mill** – the effect of pulp mill effluent on resident penguin colonies. There is a colony of 600 penguins near the proposed pulp mill site. General discussion led by Dr Woehler.

**Dredging** – the effect of dredging in Port Phillip Bay on penguin habitats - Tiana Preston, Monash University, and Andre Chiaradia, Phillip Island.

**Gill netting** – Tasmania is the only state in Australia that still allows recreational gill netting, increasing the number of penguins that drown - Dr Eric Woehler, University of Tasmania

**Tourism** - John Ayliffe, of Kangaroo Island, on the tourism potential of penguins: “My penguins are currently worth \$1500 each and they live in modern condominiums with sea views.”

- **The impact of boats and jetskis on diving penguins: Wednesday 9.50am.** Little penguins dive when they are approached by boats and jetskis and results of autopsies of little penguins showed many had injuries that were likely to be caused by watercraft. Belinda Cannell, Murdoch University
- **Dog Trial – protecting little penguins from foxes with Italian guard dogs Friday 2.50pm:** Since 2004, there have been frequent fox and dog attacks on Victoria’s Middle Island, decimating the penguin population from 600 to a few individuals. A unique trial with a Maremma guard dog, an Italian guard dog, has proven fruitful. The Maremma is bred to guard sheep and other livestock and has kept the foxes away. Not one fox footprint, not one dead bird in the one-month trial. Amanda Puecker, Deakin University,
- **Sea Ice and the winter journey of Adelie Penguins Monday: 11.30am.** What do the birds do when they leave the colony? How do they behave at sea? Using satellite tagging technology we can see how sophisticated penguins really are. They are adjusting, like other animals, to changes in their habitat brought by warming temperatures. With extensive field research and a 30,000 year-old record contained in deposits of their bones, we know more about how Antarctic penguins will adjust to rapid climate change than almost any other creature on Earth. US environmental consultant David Ainley has researched penguins for more than 30 years.

\* **For more information and to organise interviews with speakers, please contact:**

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