

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

DATE: WEDNESDAY 11 JULY, 2007

ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## **Climate change threatens natural state icon**

CLIMATE change is threatening the survival of the Southwest Tasmanian World Heritage Area, according to a leading University of Tasmania academic.

Professor David Bowman, from the UTAS School of Plant Science, was one of several keynote speakers at a recent Buttongrass Moorlands Management workshop held in Hobart.

Leading researchers from across the state and beyond attended the three-day workshop looking at the future management of the unique buttongrass moorland ecosystem.

“Buttongrass is a particularly essential element in the Southwest landscape and fire management is a very important issue,” Professor Bowman said.

He said there was an awareness of the importance of fire management to conserve the World Heritage values of Southwest Tasmania.

“However, fire management has become more difficult because of the threat of global climate change,” he said.

“The known warming of the earth that is driving climate change threatens to exacerbate the effects of fire.

“This is due to increased episodes of droughts and more lightning caused fires which can not only destroy fire sensitive alpine and rainforest vegetation, but also the organic soils that characterise the region.”

Professor Bowman said while other iconic, natural Australian landscapes were well known as being at risk due to climate change, the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area has not previously been recognised.

“We’ve got to start worrying about the Southwest landscape,” he said.

Professor Bowman said it was fortunate that Tasmania had a high level of resident expertise, which could be used to introduce adaptive responses to help preserve the ecosystem.

The workshop was held at the University of Tasmania and co-ordinated by the Department of Primary Industries and Water, in association with other industry partners.

**For more information contact:**

Professor David Bowman, School of Plant Science, University of Tasmania  
0428 894 500

**Information Released by:**  
The Media Office, University of Tasmania  
Phone: 6226 2124 Mobile: 0417 517 291  
Email: [Media.Office@utas.edu.au](mailto:Media.Office@utas.edu.au)