

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## UTAS astronomers head for the dark side

A proposed new \$2 million optical astronomy observatory is set to widen UTAS astronomers' view of the heavens even more.

The observatory, complete with a \$1.6 million optical telescope already donated by an anonymous astronomy enthusiast in the UK, will be sited well away from the lights of Hobart in the Tasmanian midlands at Bisdee Tier, to allow for better viewing.

The University of Tasmania today launched a fundraising campaign as part of the International Year of Astronomy celebrations to raise the approximately \$2 million required to build the new observatory for the telescope.

UTAS Vice-Chancellor Professor Daryl Le Grew said the new telescope will aid astronomers working in Tasmania to deepen their knowledge of space.

“The new telescope has a mirror with twice the collecting area of the current facility and will allow astronomers to look further than ever before,” he said.

“It will join a worldwide network of telescopes that finds planets orbiting other stars in the Milky Way Galaxy and our goal is to find a planet just like Earth, which could support life.”

Prof Le Grew said the new location was necessary to avoid light pollution caused by the greater Hobart area, so as to be able to see fainter and more distant stars.

“The incredible generosity of the donor to give the University this equipment is very much appreciated, but to ensure we make the optimum use of it we need to position it in the best possible place,” he said.

“We hope that the new facility will have much darker skies so we will be able to view even fainter objects than just the 70% improvement would suggest.

“The growth of the population and residential area of Hobart causes light pollution that degrades the quality of the observations.”

Professor John Dickey, Head of the UTAS School of Physics said the School had selected Bisdee Tier at Spring Hill as it is one of the best sites in the State in relation to average cloud cover, quality of astronomical seeing, light pollution and accessibility.

The School is hoping to raise sufficient funds to construct buildings to house the telescope in a rotatable dome, a control room, workshops and living quarters for visiting astronomers, he said.

“Today’s launch is particularly significant as this week marks the 444th birthday of Galileo Galilei, a special date in the International Year of Astronomy,” Prof Dickey said.

Galileo was the first astronomer to use a telescope to observe the skies and his work helped transform the sciences of astronomy and physics.

For more information about the International Year of Astronomy see <http://www.astronomy2009.org/>

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