

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

DATE: TUESDAY, 3 JULY 2004

ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Researcher stars on climate change world stage

Landmark research on climate change and its impact on Australia's natural ecosystem has elevated a University of Tasmania ecologist into the international spotlight.

School of Plant Science researcher, Dr Mark Hovenden, has established a global reputation for exposing the native grasslands of south-east Australia to both global warming and increases in carbon dioxide concentration for the first time in climate change research history.

As a result of the work, Dr Hovenden has been invited to prepare two detailed reports for the Federal Government's Greenhouse Office and is now a key member of the Commonwealth's new climate change impacts research initiative.

Internationally, he is collaborating with researchers from four countries, including America; is presenting at international conferences and contributing chapters to scientific books.

It's a dramatic rise in profile for the University's plant science team who set out to investigate climate change and its potential impact on conservation and agricultural production on the native landscape in 2002, but failed to attract funding sponsors.

"I banged my head against the wall for years. No-one was interested in climate change. People didn't believe it, they were sceptical," Dr Hovenden said.

"It was direct support through our University that got us going. They basically bank-rolled the project and trusted that it was a good idea. Now people are falling over themselves to work with us because climate change is the biggest single topic at the moment in the world media.

"People all around the world are saying the University of Tasmania is doing great work in this field."

The Australian Research Council, through the Discovery Projects scheme, recognised the value of the project and became the first sponsor in 2004 and remains committed with funding allocated for at least two more years. The Australian Greenhouse Office has also recently provided funding to expand the research.

The final report (project number DP0451686), *Impacts of climate change on sustainability of temperate native pasture: an experiment*, has just been released but research in this area will continue.

The report to the ARC has proven that climate change through the combination of global warming and increased carbon dioxide concentration, has caused a crash in the common wallaby grass species, the preferred food source of native and farmed grazing animals.

Researchers estimate that farmers will need to spend annually about \$100 per hectare on additional plant nutrients to maintain stocking rates of sheep and cattle.

Dr Hovenden said the threat to native flora and fauna, observed at Department of Defence land near Hobart, was caused by an increase in carbon dioxide which reduced nitrogen levels and therefore nutrients in soil.

“The reduction in soil nitrogen is going to affect the entire ecosystem,” Dr Hovenden said.

“It will drastically impact productivity and therefore significantly affect sustainable use and the amount of animals that can be sustained.”

Information Released by:

The Media Liaison Office, University of Tasmania

Phone: 6226 2124 Mobile: 0417 517 291

Email: Media.Office@utas.edu.au

For interviews with Dr Hovenden:

Phone: 6226 7874