

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



\$85,000 grant to help develop unique Tassie devil disease research

The Tasmanian Devil Facial Tumour Disease Program has received a significant boost with two research grants to develop a process which detects diseased devils before they develop visible tumours (preclinical diagnosis).

The Australian Research Council has provided \$60,000, while the Department of Primary Industry and Water will provide \$25,000 for the first stages in the search for blood serum protein markers which could be used in preclinical diagnosis.

The research will be undertaken by the Australian Centre for Research of Separation Science (ACROSS), which is part of the University of Tasmania.

ACROSS Researcher, Dr Michael Breadmore, said that unlike conventional approaches to preclinical diagnosis, which typically look for just one unique biomarker, this research will use state-of-the-art sensitive analytical instrumentation and ultra-sensitive chemistry being developed within ACROSS.

It would also be used to apply computer algorithms to enable detection of minor changes across the entire complement of proteins with the devil serum.

“The ability to identify diseased devils prior to growth of tumours would provide enormous advantages to screening and maintenance of disease-free captive populations and also enhance the capabilities of disease suppression trials in wild devil populations,” he said.

“This process will be a long and arduous task, but it will be more accurate as the genetic makeup of the tumours appears to be identical and the disease is spread by allograft (devils biting and fighting each other).

“Proteins are much more dynamic with the type and abundance of each protein a combination of genetic and environmental stimuli, meaning that exposure to DFTD should induce a changed protein complement within the devil,” he said.

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