



MEDIA RELEASE

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Climate change and communication focus of prize-winning thesis

The Alcorso Foundation and the University of Tasmania are pleased to announce the 2009 Environment Award winner, Dr Peat Leith.

Dr Leith studied in the UTAS School of Geography and Environmental Studies. His PhD thesis was titled: *Knowing El Niño: Integrating Knowledges of Managing Climate Variability in the Eastern Australian Rangelands*.

The \$2000 Environment Award prize is awarded to a Masters or PhD thesis that promotes environmental awareness and responsibility.

Dr Leith's research tackled ways of integrating scientific research and lay knowledge to provide a more complex and effective knowledge base, with important implications for sustainable farming and natural resource management.

Dr Leith said historically climate science has operated at a substantial distance from the people it is supposed to serve – the public.

“In my research I found that when scientists get closer to the public and work with them, they start to understand and address legitimate public concerns about scientific knowledge,” Dr Leith said.

“For instance, when climate scientists work closely with farmers they start to understand the issues farmers face, they can then learn to talk about climate risk and uncertainty in a language that makes sense to the lay person.

“They then become better equipped to produce useful and relevant information.”

Alcorso Foundation Executive Officer, Dr Yvette Watt said the selection committee was highly impressed with Dr Leith's research.

Dr Leith's supervisor and two eminent international examiners gave glowing reports of his thesis.

One examiner, James L. Buzier from Arizona State University, said “his contribution to the field is unparalleled” and described the thesis as “one of the best dissertations I have read and by far the most thorough and thoughtful analysis of climate information and resource management systems that exists.”

Dr Watt said Claudio and Lesley Alcorso were enthusiastic advocates for better environmental awareness.

“I know they would be impressed by Dr Leith’s research and the important contribution it makes to the field, especially at this time when we are faced with the potentially dramatic effects of climate change.

“Dr Leith is a very worthy recipient of this prize.”

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