

## Media Release

### Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## Tasmanian researchers explore link between fire and mankind

The relationship between humans and fire and how it has impacted on our surrounds, health and future being will be explored by two Tasmanian researchers at The Royal Society in London on September 14-15.

Professor David Bowman from the School of Biological Sciences and Dr Fay Johnston from the Menzies Institute for Medical Research will join a host of international researchers for the two-day conference, *The Interaction of Fire and Mankind*.

The scientific meeting will examine the historical, evolutionary and biophysical tensions relating to fire and climate in society, in a bid to help advance the science behind current and future-fire challenges.

The meeting will canvass the evolution of our relationship with fire; from the discovery of fire by humans through to population health and the impact on natural environments and climate change.

“This is an important meeting as it brings together the world leaders in thinking about fire management, and the place of fire in the earth’s system,” Professor Bowman said.

“Fire is a much misunderstood global process, and finding a way humans can sustainably exist with inherently flammable landscapes is pivotal given the trend for worsening fire seasons and more extreme bushfires globally, and the impact fires have on human health and greenhouse gas pollution.

“This is of real importance for a flammable place like Tasmania. This type of meeting helps to create the ‘architecture’ to think about fire and to develop new ways of managing fire sustainably.”

Professor Bowman will discuss the relationship between fire regimes and the need to manage mammalian food webs in his presentation, *Fire and Humans in Australian Food Webs from the Pleistocene to Anthropocene*.

He argues that humans can regulate animals that eat fuel by manipulating the frequency, extent and seasonality of landscape fire – and if done cleverly this opens up new ways to make flammable landscapes fire-safe and less smoky.

Dr Johnston will look at how the changing human use of fire has produced a widespread change in human exposure to air pollution, which is now recognised as the single most important global environmental risk factor for human mortality.

Her presentation will incorporate a case study of Southeast Asia examining and comparing the direct mortality impacts of air pollution from different patterns of burning.

“Exposure to landscape fire smoke is a part of being Australian, it’s unavoidable even for those in big cities as bushfire smoke can travel hundreds of kilometres,” Dr Johnston said.

“We don’t have a choice in this but we do have choices in how we manage landscapes and live with fire.

“To make sensible choices we need a clear understanding of the human health and social impacts of different fire management approaches.”

**Information released by:**

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