Biobank to invest in health

BY FIONA HORWOOD

A Tasmanian biobank will be a powerful tool for studying human disease, the Director of Menzies Research Institute, Professor Simon Foote, said following a recent government funding announcement.

The Federal and State governments will fund regional cancer centres including the infrastructure of a Biobank Tasmania: a collection of tissue, blood and information on individuals who have suffered a disease.

The Menzies Research Institute and UTAS Faculty of Law will manage the new biobank with the State Government.

Prof. Foote said it will start by collecting tissue from people suffering cancer but it is likely to expand to other diseases.

"With this we can start to study the biology and genetics of disease on an entire population.

"It will give more insights into the disease's cause than we can ever get by studying a small number of patients. We'll be able to integrate genetic and environmental data and track trends around the state as we presently do with the Cancer Registry," he said.

"With this we can start to study the biology and genetics of disease on an entire population."

The successful running of a biobank requires cooperation from many people: the tissue donor, the hospital taking the sample, the clinicians caring for the patient, the pathology service processing and storing the sample, and the staff integrating the tissue and information into the biobank.

"Individuals participating in the biobank do so with full, informed consent," Prof. Foote said.

The UTAS Faculty of Law will ensure ethical and legal integrity of the Biobank Tasmania. Access by researchers to information and tissue will be controlled by both ethics committees and biobank access committees.

A community consultation program is under way and a new website will educate Tasmanians about the biobank and ask for their thoughts on how it should be managed. This is being developed by Professor Don Chalmers, Di Nicol and Margaret Otlowski from the Faculty of Law.

Indonesian program a model for other states

BY SHARON WEBB

The University of Tasmania has a “clear and confident” Indonesian language program which should be used as a model for other Australian states, believes a leading Indonesian expert.

Professor David Hill from Murdoch University recently examined the UTAS Indonesian language program as part of his national tour looking at ways to strengthen Indonesian in universities.

“UTAS College program is innovative and working well,” Prof. Hill said.

“The teachers are tremendously enthusiastic. My impression is that they are highly motivated and the students are very positive about their studies.”

Nationally, Indonesian language studies have been declining for several years.

The previous prime minister, Kevin Rudd, recently told an Asialink Asia Society forum that while his vision was for Australia to be the most Asia-literate western nation, between 2000 and 2008 the number of Australian students studying Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese or Korean from kindergarten to Year 12 dropped by 22 per cent.

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Between 2000 and 2008 the number of Australian students studying Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese or Korean from kindergarten to Year 12 dropped by 22 per cent.

"It’s clear there’s a strong commitment among teaching staff to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning programs is high and that universities are positioned to rebuild and expand Indonesian offerings,” he said.

“But I stress that work still needs to be done to strengthen community support for Indonesian. Old stereotypes about Indonesian language and culture linger on in the community, impeding development.

“Students, parents and teachers need to be better informed about the strong Indonesian economy and the importance of Australian trade in Indonesia. More than 400 Australian firms operate in Indonesia and the Australian embassy in Indonesia is larger than any other.”

Currently around 200 students study an Asian language at UTAS, with Japanese being studied the most.
IN BRIEF

Summer at the research bench

Searching the galaxy for stars and examining the links between tourism, conservation and development in the Maasai Mara, Kenya, were among the projects undertaken by students in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Technology under the 2009-2010 Dean’s Summer Research Scholarship program. The achievements of the scholarship recipients were recognised in a ceremony held at the University Club recently. The Dean, Professor Margaret Britz, presented certificates of recognition to students who had spent six weeks embedded in a research group over the summer vacation period. The 16 students were mainly those about to enter the final year of their undergraduate program. The students were drawn from seven of the faculty’s 12 schools.

UTAS law students triumph

A UTAS law team has won the shield in the Victorian Council of Law Students Societies legal competitions championships. Mark Roberts and Anelita Browning composed the winning client interview team, closely followed by teams competing on witness examination, negotiations, and mooting (a simulated trial in an appeal court). Other competing law students included Aaron Cullen, Courtney Lockett, Pip Monk, Marko Botolja and Bunewat Koe; three of the four UTAS teams were victorious and selected to be in the grand finals of the competitions. UTAS was the most represented law school in the grand finals, which were held at the Commonwealth Law Courts and were judged by Federal Court judges, County Court judges and other legal elite. This was the first time UTAS has participated in the VCLSS competitions.

Fullbright Scholarships 2011 open

Applications are open for the 2011 Fulbright Scholarships, valued at up to $45,000. They are open to Australian citizens to do research or study in the US for 3–12 months. Scholarships can be started between 1 July 2011 and 30 June 2012. As the largest and most prestigious scholarship program in the world, Fulbright provides unique opportunities for Australians to build long-term research collaboration and links with US universities. Applications are open to postgraduates, post-doctoral, professionals and senior scholars from any field of study; they close 31 August 2010. For more information see www.fullbright.com.au.

Ian Pidd, Artistic Director of the Junction 2010 Regional Arts Australia Conference will be discussing ‘what good is a career in the arts?’ at the Launceston Open Day.

UTAS unlocks your future at Open Day

Some feature events at the Open Days this year include a presentation in Hobart by Todd Sampson, CEO of one of Australia’s top creative advertising agencies, Leo Burnett.

UTAS open days give people considering study the opportunity to find out all the information they need.

Open Day events give prospective students — and their parents and family members — the chance to experience what a university education at UTAS can offer. And with more than 100 undergraduate degrees in traditional and specialised areas, there is sure to be something of interest.

Open Days include a comprehensive expo where anyone can talk to UTAS staff and students and learn about the courses on offer, scholarships, applications and student accommodation. There will also be course overview presentations and general information sessions throughout each of the days, as well as campus tours, activities and demonstrations to inform and enjoy.

Feature events at Open Days this year include:

• A presentation in Hobart by Todd Sampson, CEO of one of Australia’s top creative advertising agencies, Leo Burnett, and also the co-creator of the Earth Hour initiative;

• In Launceston Ian Pidd, Artistic Director of the Junction 2010 Regional Arts Australia Conference, will be discussing ‘what good is a career in the arts?’

• At the Burnie event, testing sessions will be held for the Australian Sports Commission’s National Talent Identification and Development program, of which the School of Human Life Science is a testing centre. This program is searching for the next generation of Aussie sports stars.

UTAS Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Provost Professor David Rich, said Open Day is a key date on the university calendar for staff, students and members of the community.

“There truly is something for everyone on offer at the Open Day events, whether you are continuing straight from Year 12, contemplating a return to study, or considering which postgraduate course might suit you best,” Prof. Rich said.

“Open Day is not only for aspiring and continuing scholars, it is also a chance for the community to join us at UTAS, see the facilities, meet the people and experience a taste of uni life.”
**ManCheck for improving men's health**

**BY MICHELLE NICHOLS**

UTAS’ School of Medicine is calling for Tasmanian men to help doctors-in-training become better skilled in performing sensitive men’s examinations.

Under the MCTA ManCheck program, men recruited from the community will be trained as professional patients or clinical teaching associates and will provide valuable feedback to medical students on appropriate technique and etiquette for genital and other physical examinations.

The school’s head of surgery Professor Richard Turner said doctors-in-training must be comfortable and adequately skilled in performing physical examinations.

“Because of the sensitivities involved, it is difficult for medical students to obtain the experience they need as part of their standard curriculum,” Prof. Turner said.

“The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing has declared both men’s health and cancer to be major priorities.

“Leading causes of death and diseases in men include prostate cancer, tumours of the sexual organs and bladder cancers. Colorectal cancer is also the most frequently occurring cancer to affect both men and women in Australia.”

Prof. Turner said all of these conditions depend on early diagnosis and treatment to provide good outcomes for patients.

“That’s why the men’s program is being developed at the UTAS School of Medicine in Hobart.

“The first step has been to recruit men to do professional training as clinical teaching associates over a four-month period. In the first few weeks, more than 100 men of varying ages expressed interest in the program, 75 per cent of the men were aged 50 years or older.

“A comprehensive teaching program will be delivered to medical students commencing in early 2011.

Those trained as clinical teaching associates will be paid as with full-time students to ensure they continue to come forward to help.

MCTA ManCheck program is a joint venture between UTAS and the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia.

Program Director Neil Seflon describes the development as significantly high and believes champions for men’s health will continue to come forward to help.

For more information phone (03) 6223 1247 OR email: mona@loofs-samorzewski.com for an expression of interest.

**Honours for UTAS Furniture Design building**

**BY SHARON WEBB**

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Award-winning architecture: The Tasmanian chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects gave two awards to the new Furniture Design building at Inveresk, commenting that it was obvious that “environmentally sustainable design principles have been considered and integrated from inception …”

Commenting on the building, the jury wrote that the Furniture Design building “seamlessly incorporates simple sustainable design techniques into an architectural expression that is appropriate not only to the industrial nature of the site but also the pragmatic requirements of the newly-established furniture school.

“It is evident that environmentally sustainable design principles have been considered and integrated from inception although this has not been allowed to dominate.”

The Governor of Tasmania opened the $2.3m Furniture Design building on 30 April. It is part of the School of Architecture and Design and attached to the historic railway building which is the home of the majority of the school.

Constructed of a laminated Tasmanian oak portal frame with fibreglass sheeting, galvanised steel sheeting and plywood, its “pared-back” design incorporates environmentally-friendly innovative heating and cooling mechanisms.

The building is currently used by 25 full-time furniture design students and 40 students completing furniture design electives.

The head of the School of Architecture, Professor Roger Fay, said he was delighted that to date the school’s two buildings had received seven awards at state and national levels.

In addition, Master of Architecture student Chloe Comino won the SWT Blythe Student Award for her designs; this award is open to architecture students at any level.

UTAS School of Architecture alumnus Todd Henderson won the Emerging Architect Award, given to an architect who has graduated within the past 10 years. Todd works at Birrell Architects in Launceston.

**Securing pathways to university**

The University has a deep commitment to the national and Tasmanian agenda of increasing educational participation and attainment.

Nationally, the Commonwealth has invoked ambitious targets for participation in higher education in the wake of the Bradley Review. Universities have been challenged to provide opportunities for people from all backgrounds to participate in higher education, and to provide the support necessary to help them succeed.

With Council’s encouragement, UTAS is working to ensure that we play our full part in delivering on those targets, while also contributing in full to the Commonwealth’s other objective of expanding and strengthening the country’s research base.

At the state level, increasing educational attainment and improving participation rates was the philosophy behind the government’s Tasmania Tomorrow reforms that created the Academy and Polytechnic models.

Despite the changes announced recently in the post-Year 10 framework, the government’s commitment to improving educational outcomes remains.

As a member of its board, I am disappointed that the Academy will not have the opportunity to build on the progress it was already making in terms of setting a clear pathway for Tasmanian students wanting a university degree.

However, I have been assured by the new Minister for Education, Lin Thorp, that the recent post-Year 10 reforms will retain those successes while refining those elements not working so well. The university will continue to have a strong voice in the development of the new senior secondary system.

UTAS has recently agreed with the State Government that the focus of our formal partnership agreement for the foreseeable future will be increasing educational attainment and participation. To achieve our ambitious objectives it will involve substantial changes across Tasmania.

UTAS already has much to be proud of in this area. Over the past decade, we have increased student numbers substantially, meeting targets ahead of schedule. We have been increasing the proportion of Tasmanians with a degree.

UTAS has achieved much but there is much, much more to be done. The university will need to play a leading role, in partnership with the State Government and other players across Tasmania. This is difficult stuff, but one of the biggest challenges is probably in how we change ourselves to accommodate a much wider cohort of Tasmanians in ways that will maximise their chances of academic success, while retaining the all-important quality of our education and excellence of our graduates for which we are renowned.

David Rich

www.utas.edu.au/vc
Iran to break the dream of a nuclear weapons-free world

In little more than a decade, India, Pakistan and North Korea have developed nuclear weapons. DR MATT SUSSEx and DR MATT KILLINGSWORTH discuss their belief that Iran will be next . . .

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan believes the world can now stop fretting about Iran’s nuclear ambitions following the recent deal between Iran, Turkey and Brazil.

What looks like a promising breakthrough where Iran agreed to ship 1200 kg of its nuclear fuel to Turkey in return for fuel rods to make medical isotopes for “research” was successfully brokered by smaller countries after the US and big powers in Europe had failed.

But the deal actually raises more questions than it answers.

First, it reveals starkly just how flawed the ailing Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is. Under Article 4 of the treaty, states are not just entitled – but actively encouraged – to research, develop and produce nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. And this, of course, is exactly what Tehran says it has been doing. In the transcript of the most recent deal with Turkey and Brazil, Iran reaffirmed its commitment to Article 4.

According to the NPT, then, Iran hasn’t yet done anything wrong. It will only have formally breached its obligations once it develops a weapon. But by that time, the genie will be well and truly out of the bottle.

Second, the “swap” signed in Tehran isn’t the first attempt to get Iran to give up its potentially weapons-grade uranium. Earlier this year Iran withdrew from a similar deal involving Russia, the United States and France, and sponsored by the IAEA, during heightened international attention to nuclear dangers. The US recently signed a new arms limitation treaty with Russia and its Nuclear Posture Review declares that the US will not use (or threaten to use) nuclear weapons against non-nuclear countries. The five-yearly NPT Review conference is currently underway, at which the parties may even agree on the agenda this time, and President Obama recently hosted a two-day Nuclear Review Summit in Washington.

Yet the Iranian nuclear issue has noticeably taken a back seat each time, with references to Tehran’s ambitions being made either obliquely, or not at all. Obama’s Washington Summit concluded surprisingly that the most pressing proliferation issue was keeping weapons-grade material away from terrorists. Obama’s own talkfest would have been unnecessary if the NPT actually worked. But unfortunately it doesn’t.

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The view from here

Obama’s own talkfest would have been unnecessary if the Non-Proliferation Treaty actually worked. But unfortunately it doesn’t.

NPT the third aspect is absent, the second can’t be rigorously enforced, and the first is selectively interpreted. This means that those interested in preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapon are running out of options. Iran remains hostile towards the IAEA and there is a fear that this latest piecemeal offering might placate China and Russia enough to ward off a new series of UN Security Council sanctions.

But are there really any other avenues? Advocates of punitive action in the guise of military strikes know that the chances of success are slim. And who would perform them? Israel is the most likely candidate in terms of capabilities, but a pre-emptive attack by Tel Aviv would jeopardise patient regional diplomacy that is only starting to bear fruit. Likewise, in the current political climate it is hard to see Barack Obama authorising a surgical strike, even though prudence dictates that he is probably planning for it if necessary.

Granted, the continued hypocrisy of the nuclear ‘club’ of free (the US, Russia, China France and the UK) arguably contributes to the problem – and few would accept at face value Obama’s apparent renewed commitment to denuclearisation.

But the Iranian problem is a fine example of the many grey areas in contemporary international relations, where international law is unhelpful, and using force is fraught with danger. Amidst this uncertainty Iran is playing a skilful game, with its Foreign Ministry declaring that it will continue to enrich uranium up to weapons-grade level.

Such announcements do little more than deepen the fear that worse is to come – and that there is very little that can be done about it. Despite the best efforts of Obama, and even Kevin Rudd and Gareth Evans, dreams about a nuclear weapons-free world now seem even more utopian. In little more than a decade we’ve seen India, Pakistan and North Korea all go nuclear. Iran will surely be next.

Dr Matt Sussex is Senior Lecturer in the UTAS School of Government and Dr Matt Killingsworth is Associate Lecturer in the School of Government.

Schwartz is the music man

BY CHERIE COOPER

The glamour of Broadway recently came to Hobart’s Festival of Broadway and the star was creative genius Stephen Schwartz. Mr Schwartz, a well-known Broadway legend, has written music and lyrics for major productions including Pippin, Godspell, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Pocahontas, The Prince of Egypt and the recent hit Wicked which opened in 2003 and is currently running on Broadway. His work has earned him two Academy Awards and three Grammys.

He was in town to perform his hits, talk about his body of work and to conduct master-classes for aspiring composers and lyricists. “I’m excited about the concerts but it’s much more exciting to do the master classes,” he said at the time.

“Working with Australian composers and lyricists, some of whom are going to be from Tasmania, is exciting,” he said. “I’ve read the work of some of them before and it’s very talented and promising.”

Mr Schwartz said that musical theatre was special because of its intrinsic multi-tasking – it encompasses dance, music, storytelling, drama and design.

A photo of Mr Schwartz was taken by photographers here with soloists Silvie Paladin and Liz Callaway.
Parasites beautiful and abhorrent

BY MERIAN ELLIS

The fascinating faces of the most repellent of life forms were the feature of the Parasites in Focus exhibition at the Cradle Coast campus.

The exhibition consisted of twenty-six superb photographic prints showing the amazing microscopic world of the parasite from the common head louse to parasites found in the nostrils of deep-sea fish, accompanied by two hands-on parasite exhibits. Parasites in Focus includes photographs by scientists from the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), a national organisation of scientists, universities and research institutions, and is touring nationally.

It was exhibited at the Cradle Coast campus in May and early June, attracting more than 150 students and members of the public.

Cradle Coast campus community engagement officer Nicki Fletcher said the images are both beautiful and abhorrent but provide a fascinating insight into the most common and manipulative of all life forms.

"Parasites are often thought of as disgusting and regarded as an aberration but the parasitic way of life is the most common way of life on the planet," Ms Fletcher said.

“This exhibition has appeal for anyone interested in science, photography or what they may be carrying around in their gut. It provides a totally different perspective on parasites such as tapeworms, roundworms, ticks and fleas which are transformed into art forms through the lens of the microscope," she said.

This exhibition was supported by the Imaginarium, Devonport, and is sponsored by the ARC/NHMRC Research Network for Parasitology, The Australian Society for Parasitology, Questacon and the Department of Education, Science and Training.

By Merian Elllis

Parasites are often thought of as disgusting and regarded as an aberration but the parasitic way of life is the most common way of life on the planet.'
Three of this year’s PhD students have been awarded University of Tasmania’s Elite Research Scholarships, providing financial support of $30,000 a year, tax-free over the three years of their research projects, plus a lap top computer to assist with their projects.

The University of Tasmania has over 100 Elite Research Scholarships for PhD candidates in areas such as health and medical sciences, natural, physical and applied sciences, as well as business and management, regional development, education and the humanities.

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The University of Tasmania has over 100 Elite Research Scholarships for PhD candidates in areas such as health and medical sciences, natural, physical and applied sciences, as well as business and management, regional development, education and the humanities.
Learning medicine in Tassie’s rural communities

The aim is to produce junior doctors well-equipped with the skills and knowledge to address communities’ healthcare needs.

Donation to benefit future doctors

The donation will provide financial assistance in the form of an ongoing scholarship for up to six Tasmanian students directly support future generations of doctors in Tasmania,” he said.

Ageing report first step in older people living more happily

The first report from an important project researching Community Engagement for Productive Ageing in rural Tasmanian communities has found that older people show it’s possible to meet the challenges of ageing head-on, and live independently and successfully.

The report’s co-author, Dr Peter Orpin from the University Department of Rural Health, said the major finding of the report was that despite the inevitable losses accompanying ageing, it is wrong and unhelpful to view ageing as pathological with many problems to be fixed.

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“We are working towards developing strategies that can help individuals to support older people who enrich rural communities and their older people.”

Full report: See www.rca.edu.au/growingolder

Survey older people, their service providers and government policy makers; Audit existing Australian and international models of service provision; and Produce a new Tasmanian service model based on the findings from the first phase.

The report’s co-author, Dr Peter Orpin from the University Department of Rural Health, said the major finding of the report was that despite the inevitable losses accompanying ageing, it is wrong and unhelpful to view ageing as pathological with many problems to be fixed.

“It’s a natural process which can be a relatively positive or negative experience depending on a complex, often fine balance of factors within the individual and their environment,” he said.

“We are working towards developing strategies that can help individuals to support older people who enrich rural communities and their older people.”

Full report: See www.rca.edu.au/growingolder
Thai trade for Tassie vegies

BY MERIAN ELLIS

Tasmanian vegetable farmers are working on wedging open the door to lucrative markets in Thailand through a project being run by the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research.

In April this year the Australian Government granted $116,000 to TIAR to develop a marketing and promotion strategy to determine the needs and commercial viability of new South-East Asian vegetable export markets.

TIAR Vegetable Centre Marketing and Development Officer David Wells started a project last year looking at market opportunities for Tasmanian-grown vegetables. The intensity of the project increased to look harder for somewhere to sell overnight with the announcement of New South-East Asian vegetable market TIAR to develop a marketing and promotion strategy to determine the needs and commercial viability of new South-East Asian vegetable export markets.

“Many students have a genuine feel for the stock market but have not even started working on a project such as this,” he said.

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Seaglider survives harsh Southern Ocean

A small Seaglider has spent 76 days in the harsh conditions of the Southern Ocean gathering observations to help scientists better understand currents and ocean parameters that influence the Australian climate and marine ecosystems.

The Australian Integrated Marine Observing System (IMOS) was launched from the Marine National Facility Research Vessel Southern Surveyor in late March some 680 kilometres from Tasmania. IMOS Scientific Officer Dr Katy Hill said the Seaglider, a small type of ocean glider, was at sea for 76 days before staff from CSIRO retrieved it off the continental shelf near Southport in early June.

“The first voyage has successfully demonstrated the Seaglider’s capacity in the harsh conditions of the vast Southern Ocean,” Dr Hill said. Ocean gliders are autonomous vehicles designed to operate in water depths up to 1000 metres. By changing buoyancy, they are able to descend and ascend. They have wings allowing them to move horizontally while profiling across strong currents, which means they are easier to control. Seagliders fix their positions via satellite, relaying collected data and receiving any new commands from the scientists.

The Seaglider is one of 17 in the Australian National Facility for Ocean Gliders fleet, which is operated and managed from the University of Western Australia. Currently ocean gliders are deployed off south-west Australia and the Coral Sea.

“The SOTS site is collecting sustained observations of the atmospheric surface layer, upper and deep-ocean to understand the transfer of heat, moisture, energy and CO2 between the atmosphere and ocean, and improve our knowledge of climate, carbon processes and the role of the ecosystem,” Dr Hill said.

“In the period from September this year to March next year, it is expected that Seagliders will be deployed off Tasmania, traverse to the SOTS site and then return.”

“We hope that at least three Seagliders will be in the water at any given time, with one traversing towards the SOTS site, one at the SOTS site and the other returning to Tasmania.”

IMOS is supported by the Australian Government, through the National Collaborative Infrastructure Strategy and the Super Science Initiative. It is led by the University of Tasmania on behalf of the Australian marine and climate science community.

For more information about the Seaglider visit: http://imos.org.au/

Tosia magnifica! say teachers viewing underwater photos

Sixteen Launceston teachers almost goggled at the diversity and unexpectedly bright colours of life in the Tamar River and Bass Strait as they viewed an exhibition of photographs at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

They were there with the photographer, David Mayne, and PhD student Stephen McGowan to view David’s exhibition, Beneath the Waves, in preparation for bringing their students to see it.

Mayfield Primary School teacher Carol Boyd wanted to get some insight into the exhibition so she knew what to point out to her kids.

But really, kids wouldn’t need to have things pointed out with this exhibition; they’d skip from the mesmerising starfish collection, including the magnificent biscuit orange and cream star Tosia magnifica, to the amazing close-up of the spines of a purple urchin found near Garden Island. Teachers wouldn’t get a word in edgeways.

David Mayne, photographer and lecturer in resource sustainability in the National Centre for Marine Conservation and Resource Sustainability, and his team of PhD students from the Australian Maritime College are currently giving tours to teachers and students from both primary and high schools.

“We don’t know much about the Tamar estuary or our impacts on the Tamar River,” David said.

“The only way to understand more is to manoeuvre its health and conduct research into natural and human impacts within the catchment.”

Carol Boyd was clear on what attracted her, as an educator, to the exhibition.

“Most important for children is the passion of the presenters,” she said.

Beneath the waves: AMC photographer David Mayne points out the colour-changing ability of the local big-bellied seahorse, Hippocampus abdominalis, to Mayfield Primary School teachers Carol Boyd and Lorraine Todd.
Weeding out environmental issues

It’s a tough job weeding but for the people in the volunteer group Sea Spurge Remote Area Teams (or SPRATS) it’s a labour of love.

The SPRATS volunteers spend hundreds of days weeding every year to eradicate potentially damaging weeds from Tasmania’s west and south coasts.

Dr Jon Marsden-Smedley, research fellow from the UTAS School of Geography and Environmental Studies, is an active participant in the wildcare group that was formed in 2007 by a group of volunteer bushwalkers and people who combine bushwalking with weed management.

SPRATS aims to eradicate all sea spurge and marram grass from the 600 km of Tasmania’s west coast and south coast between Strahan and Cockle Creek, where the weed is currently causing major adverse changes to the environment.

Sea spurge is a weed that is devastating coastal landforms and ecosystems across Southern Australia.

Dr Marsden-Smedley researches these invasive weeds and recently ran a coastal weed management workshop.

‘Sea spurge could also adversely impact birds like hooded plovers, pied oystercatchers and sooty oystercatchers which have their strong hold on this coast along with the critically endangered orange-bellied parrot.’

The majority of this coastline is world heritage, listed for its outstanding natural and cultural values,” he said.

“Sea spurge could also adversely impact birds like hooded plovers, pied oystercatchers and sooty oystercatchers which have their strong hold on this coast along with the critically endangered orange-bellied parrot.”

He advised attendees to be aware that Sicilian sea lavender, a weed, was not to be confused with the native yellow sea lavender, despite their closeness in appearance.

Also on hand to offer advice to the enthusiastic weeder was bird expert Dr Eric Woehler. He emphasised the importance of keeping a respectful distance from shore birds and terns when weeding. Birds such as the fairy tern and the little tern lay their tiny eggs on the beach and are easily spooked away from protecting their babies if disturbed.

Early warnings from elephant seals

Scientists hope to reinforce the value of the Southern Ocean as a warning system for the corals on the Great Barrier Reef by tracking the response of elephant seals to changes in ocean conditions.

The Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre in partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation is researching how elephant seals respond to changes in ocean conditions.

Using special sensors mounted on the heads of elephant seals in the Southern Ocean, the project team – comprising researchers from CSIRO and the University of Tasmania – will collect data about the seals’ behaviour and ocean conditions, such as temperature and salinity.

University of Tasmania marine biologist Professor Mark Hindell said the sensors allow researchers to investigate how elephant seals respond to changes in ocean conditions.

‘By tracking the seals, we’re also gaining critical information about these changing conditions in the Southern Ocean, which is a driver of world climate.’

Southern Ocean, which is a driver of world climate,” he said.

The results will reinforce the value of the Southern Ocean as an early warning system for the corals and others species on the Great Barrier Reef, which are particularly sensitive to even small changes in water temperature and pH.

The project will run for 12 months and will be followed by deeper analysis of data to generate additional scientific results and inform research publications.

The climate change research project has received backing from QANTAS.
Nine months at the beach

A MC honours student Chris Slavin is about to spend the next nine months at the beach thanks to an innovative project and a recently awarded scholarship.

While it sounds like the perfect career choice, Chris will be getting his hands dirty because his project will explore the types and sources of marine debris in northern Tasmania. He hopes to feed the results of this work into the legislative process, as well as the public’s general awareness.

Originally from Victoria’s Mornington Peninsula, Chris made the move to Tasmania to finish his Bachelor of Applied Science (Marine Environment) at AMC’s National Centre for Marine Conservation and Resource Sustainability (NMCERS). Following his mid-year graduation he’s pushing straight into Honours and the marine debris project. The project was developed by Associate Professor Martine Campbell from the NMCERS and is based on a broader aspect of human impacts on the marine environment.

“Marine debris has always been an aspect of marine conservation that I’ve been keen on – even before I started the course,” Chris said.

“There’s a strong visual effect as well as the negative effect it can have on marine animals. There’s also the health risk to humans.”

The project has three phases, starting with a survey to gauge the perceptions of Tasmanians towards marine debris.

The second part of the project will involve nine different beaches: three pristine beaches, like Strahan, as well as three recreational beaches, like Sisters Beach near Burnie or Beer Barrel in St Helens, and also three heavily urbanised beaches, like Bell Bay.

“I’ll pick up the rubbish I find and sort it into different categories, such as medicinal, sanitary, plastics, fishing gear, wooden material, metals and fabrics,” Chris said. “I’ll also look at whether it’s land-based or marine-based litter, such as litter from boats, beach goers, or from stormwater drains.”

“I’ll also investigate policies that relate to marine debris, from an international level to a state level. Finally, I’ll overlay this with an analysis of public perception – whether members of the public think their actions contribute to this problem.”

“I hope to do something that could influence legislation and gain perspective on the public’s knowledge of marine debris – hopefully something that can educate the public on issues related to this kind of debris so they can change their actions.”

Chris’s project received a welcome boost at the end of May. He was awarded 2010 Alcorso Foundation Honours Environment Scholarship from the Alcorso Foundation – an organisation founded to continue the values of noted Tasmanian wine figure Claudio Alcorso and his wife Lesley. The foundation fosters international exchanges with Italy as well as sponsoring a number of prizes and awards in the areas of the arts, the environment and social justice.

To find out more about current and potential NMCERS projects see www.uts.edu.au/marine-conservation-sustainability

My PhD

Analysing carbs for better food

I knew from my undergraduate years that I enjoyed analytical, instrumental and organic chemistry the most. My project covers all of these areas.

The idea of my PhD started from my Honours project where I made synthetic molecules (fluorescent tags) which aided the detection and analysis of carbohydrates. A later collaboration with the University of Queensland helped me understand the importance of carbohydrates especially in rice starch. This encouraged me to investigate the detection and analysis of carbohydrates in foods.

The title of my PhD is ‘New strategies to improve the sensitivity of capillary electrophoresis for carbohydrate analysis’.

My project involved analysing carbohydrates, which are complex sugars found in food that we consume on a daily basis. The idea was to detect and analyse minute quantities of carbohydrates which cannot be detected by old conventional methods that usually take a large amount of time and require big pieces of equipment to do so.

In order to make the detection of carbohydrates in food easier we explored a few strategies. The first one was to improve detection using a state-of-the-art laser-induced fluorescence system. This was an expensive strategy that involved purchasing a hi-tech instrument.

The second part was to design a special fluorescent molecule tag which can be attached to carbohydrates to considerably improve detection. We designed and made a new fluorescent tag which worked well and better than some of the commercially available tags in carbohydrate analysis. Using a technique called capillary electrophoresis we were able to take small quantities of carbohydrates and concentrate them around 50-fold allowing for better detection.

Ultimately the method was transferred to a microchip which is a very small device which allows even smaller quantities of the sample (nano litre sample volumes) and much faster separation. When you go from capillary electrophoresis to a microchip everything gets reduced at least 10 times – the time of analysis, the sample quantity and so on. This chip also allows concentration of the sample to achieve better signal and ability to detect carbohydrates. This is the ultimate nobility of the project; the ability to do the analysis on such a tiny device.

This project is ultimately a starting point for future projects that will be able to improve the quality of food through quick carbohydrate analysis, which in turn will make food healthier for everyone.
Travel inspires Turkish textures

BY SHARON WEBB

“Turkish Moment” was created through Tasmanian artist Carmel Burns’ absorption of the shapes, colours and images of Turkey when she travelled there.

The work is included in her exhibition, Beyond the Double, which is on display at the NEW Gallery at the UTAS Newnham campus until 12 July. The exhibition’s eye-catching works combine an Asian/Middle Eastern aesthetic with Carmel’s fascination with the texture of paper as a complex aspect of art. Many are oil-based ink on hand-made paper, some with gold and silver leaf.

“The crescent is always present in Turkey, on the flag and all the mosques,” Carmel said.

This piece evolved intuitively as I absorbed my surroundings in that country.”

Carmel’s technique often involves beginning a work without a definite plan in mind; the work evolves as she expresses herself.

These days she often works with unusual handmade papers, occasionally tearing and weaving them into compositions, or using collage to create broadly representational and non-figurative works.

“I’m increasingly interested in the texture and quality of the paper after some past projects on specially-commissioned, hand-made paper,” she said.

“The exhibition includes a progression of works done over time, with some of the more recent pieces made from fragments of specially-commissioned, hand-made paper adhered to canvas.”

Works such as Turkish Moment are a radical departure for Carmel Burns, whose original training was as a printer.

Her screened works utilise the structural and procedural processes of the craft with a painterly layering of inks. She uses the screen printing to apply colour as a painter would use a brush.

Carmel describes herself as a “screen painter”, producing single, one-off images created stage by stage, colour by colour, using traditional screen techniques, sometimes with the inclusion of other materials such as gold leaf.

Her works have a vitality and energy that stems from the exciting element of creative exploration. As Carmel puts it, “each picture is always a revelation of possibilities”.

Carmel Burns (b. 1953) majored in print making at Melbourne State College and taught art and craft for 10 years before moving to Tasmania in 1984 with her husband, Tony Smurhett, to establish their Studio Gallery near Deloraine.

Her commissions include art-works for Pier One Hotel on Sydney Harbour and St John’s Ambulance executive building in Perth.

Carmel plays a major role in the art and creative consultancy services offered by her business partnership with Tony. Their company, Studio Editions Pty Ltd, has interests in art, education, publishing and broadcasting and has worked with institutions including Tate Britain, the National Gallery of Australia, various publishing houses and a leading Japanese fashion house.

What’s on/Classifieds