



MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

DATE: TUESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2013

ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

Climate focus for award-winning young scientists

Two young University of Tasmania scientists with a research focus on climate change are the winners of this year's Tasmanian Young Tall Poppy Science Awards.

The prestigious annual awards aim to recognise the achievements of Australia's outstanding young scientific researchers and communicators.

Dr Scott Ling, Research Associate in the UTAS Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) and Dr Geoffrey While, Lecturer in the UTAS School of Zoology, received their awards tonight.

UTAS Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Rathjen congratulated Dr While and Dr Ling on their achievements.

"The Tall Poppy Awards are particularly special because they recognise not only the considerable academic achievements of the young recipients, but the strength of their community engagement activities.

"The ability to communicate the complexities of scientific research is an important facet of a successful scientist - not only does this engagement demonstrate an admirable consideration for informing the public, it plays a crucial role in encouraging young people to seriously think about science as an academic and career path.

"I commend Dr While and Dr Ling on their achievements, which are considerable for two researchers in the early stages of their careers; I have no doubt we can expect more great things from them both in the future."

Dr Ling is also winner of the Tall Poppy of the Year award.

"I am honoured to have received this type of recognition, which has come about following many years of hard work and dedication, both beneath the waves and in the laboratory.

“I’ve never thought of myself as a Tall Poppy; if you spend enough time diving on exposed coasts Mother Nature tends to throw up a whole bunch of things to ensure that you never get too far ahead of yourself.”

Dr Ling’s research focuses on understanding how climate change and other non-climatic stressors, like overfishing, can interact to cause the collapse of important rocky reef ecosystems.

Dr Ling has been involved with a number of community initiatives targeting marine pests and he has trained up citizen scientists to undertake scuba observations to keep track of sea urchin populations.

He also shares his passion, experience and understanding of marine ecosystems at every opportunity by giving lectures at UTAS and presentations to school groups, adult education classes and broader interest groups.

Dr While’s research looks broadly at animal behaviour and evolution, with a particular focus on why animals live together.

“My research explores how environmental conditions affect the costs and benefits of animals living together. I then use this data to try and predict where, when and why animal societies evolve.”

Dr While’s research also addresses more applied questions relating to how species respond to climate change.

“My research on reptiles and amphibians explores how changes in temperature, as a result of global warming, affect an individuals’ behaviour. I then use this data to predict how species will respond to projected climate change.”

Dr While recently returned to UTAS to take up a lectureship after two years of post-doctoral work at the University of Oxford in the UK, studying introduced lizard species.

He said it was a “huge honour” to be awarded a Tall Poppy.

“It’s great to be recognised, not only for the research you do, but for the contribution you make to the community,” he said.

“I am particularly interested in educating, informing and enthusing the next generation of scientists, particularly in the biological and environmental fields.”

Dr While’s younger brother, Dr Peter While, also a UTAS alumnus, received a Young Tall Poppy Award in 2010 for his work in Applied Mathematics.

About the Australian Institute of Policy and Science Tall Poppy Campaign: The Tall Poppy Campaign was created in 1998 by AIPS to recognise and celebrate Australian intellectual and scientific excellence and to encourage younger Australians to follow in the footsteps of our outstanding achievers. The Tall Poppy

Campaign currently recognises the achievements of Australian scientists through the annual Young Tall Poppy Science Awards and the biennial CSL Florey Medal.

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