

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

Thursday 14 May 2015

Maria Island a spectacular classroom for budding marine biologists in new IMAS course

The University of Tasmania is expecting to produce a new wave of marine biologists with the introduction of an exciting new course customised for year 11 and 12 students.

A Practical Introduction to Temperate Marine Biology is now on offer through the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) as part of the University of Tasmania College Program, following the success of a pilot program held over the recent Easter school break.

Led by IMAS researchers Dr Scott Ling and Dr Mary-Anne Lea, with support from conservation group Wildmob and Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife, nine students from colleges around Tasmania spent five days in one of the world's most spectacular classrooms – the waters around Maria Island.

The students finished with a day working with scientists in the award-winning IMAS Waterfront building in Hobart.

The course presented lectures covering ecological concepts and current challenges faced by marine ecosystems and marine stakeholder groups, and the students gained first-hand experience in the design of robust sampling of fish, zooplankton and invertebrates and algal species from a range of marine habitats.

Dr Ling said that a key focus of their experience was to gain an understanding of the dynamics of marine communities protected within the Maria Island Marine Reserve, declared in 1991, which offered the perfect location to whet their appetite for marine science.

“Even though the students had little experience in marine biology, they absolutely thrived when given the opportunity to put on a wetsuit and dive beneath the waves armed with nothing other than a clipboard, underwater paper and a keen eye for a myriad of marine species,” he said.

“I don't think there is any doubt that it succeeded in firing up the imagination of students who now have an inspired experience and a clear picture of what it means to study marine science at the University of Tasmania.”

In what was very much a hands-on, data-gathering experience, students engaged in a series of onshore and sub-surface assessments of species abundances.

Applying themselves to the challenge of identifying more than 70 marine species during the week-long island adventure, the catch-cry from students was “Doing it for the data”, typifying the often challenging nature of sampling marine environments.

Those students who pass the unit will have a great advantage going into a Bachelor of Marine & Antarctic Studies. Aside from the 12.5 HECS-free credit points towards their degree, they’ll hit the ground running with a real-world experience.

Tasmanian Department of Education science curriculum teacher Jen Earle assisted IMAS with integrating the course into current school curriculum and she closely observed activities both above and below the water on Maria Island.

“The marine biology course has a very good connection with Environmental Science & Society and also Biology, with the year 11 and 12 students involved in the course coming from these areas of interest. This experience is something they can’t have as part of the normal school system.”

For more information or interviews with course co-ordinator and IMAS Centre for Ecology and Biodiversity deputy director Dr Mary-Anne Lea, please contact IMAS media officer Lana Best on 0417 978 025.

Print media: Photos of the students on Maria Island are available at Dropbox - <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6rm8pihqh7anz10/AAOj3M1eabWqll4otmN6NPMa?dl=0>

Television and online media: Video footage is available at Dropbox - https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3y20ik3zpnnqols/AAOtEwqF_Zg-zxCrGMYenYNa?dl=0

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