

Media Statement

Monday, April 24, 2006

NEW CENTRE AT UWA TO REVOLUTIONISE PLANT RESEARCH

The Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, Julie Bishop will open the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence in Plant Energy Biology at The University of Western Australia on Thursday, April 27, 2006, at 5pm.

This is the first Centre of Excellence from the Federal Government to be housed in Western Australia and is set to use its \$25 million budget over the next five years to build a deep understanding of how plants regulate energy generation in the capture of sunlight to produce food.

"Globally, energy fluxes through plants dwarf even mankind's use of fossil fuels, but much remains to be discovered about how plants control their energy metabolism," Centre Acting Director, Professor Jim Whelan said.

Using the latest technological advances, the Centre will form a key research focus in Western Australia with applications in agriculture, plant stress tolerance, and the effect of global environment change on plant function. With laboratories of the Centre spanning out to Canberra and Sydney, key collaborations with top European plant science centres and a joint laboratory with Zhejiang University in China, it is set to become an important component of the internationalization of molecular plant science in Australia.

The Centre is located in UWA's new Molecular and Chemical Sciences building and houses the laboratories of the first ARC Federation Fellow to come to WA, Professor Steven Smith, the latest WA Premier's Research Fellow, Professor Ian Small, and the 2005 winner of the Science Minister's Prize for Australian Life Scientist of the Year, Professor Harvey Millar.

The team of 60 researchers are focused on the genes, proteins and small molecules that define the health, growth and productivity of plants. The Centre's motto is 'Genes to Energy' and in addition to its high-impact research, it will be undertaking an education and outreach program into the Western Australian community to explain the major implications of plant energy biology for increasing the value of the agricultural economy and safeguarding the natural environment.

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