

MEDIA STATEMENT

ECOLOGISTS, VETERINARIANS & WILDLIFE EXPERTS SPEAK OUT FOR FUTURE OF TASMANIAN DEVIL

Tarkine Road Could Bring Deadly Disease into last Devil Refuge

More than twenty leading experts in fields including veterinary science, zoology, ecology and immunology and from as far afield as California and France have spoken out in support of a colleague who publicly expressed scientific concerns about the plight of the endangered Tasmanian Devil and the impact of the proposed Tarkine road, in North-West Tasmania.

In an open letter sent to Tasmanian and National papers and the Tasmanian Premier, David Bartlett, Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, and respective Opposition Leaders, Will Hodgman and Malcolm Turnbull, the scientists collectively support the concerns expressed by Tasmanian veterinarian, Dr Colette Harmsen. The scientists have also expressed disappointment and shock that the Tasmanian Minister with responsibility for biodiversity, David Llewellyn, should have so quickly dismissed serious science-based concerns expressed by Dr Colette Harmsen.

The State Government acknowledges that the spread of devil facial tumour disease has killed well in excess of half the Tasmanian Devil population across Tasmania and is threatening to push the animal towards extinction, with the species now listed as *endangered*.

The Tarkine, a 447,000 hectare wilderness area in North-West Tasmania that includes Australia's largest tract of temperate rainforest, is the last refuge of healthy, disease-free devils. The Tasmanian government has recently rejected a regional tourism plan prepared for the Tarkine by the Cradle-Coast Authority that has the broad support of local councils, tourism operators and conservationists, and has instead decided to give Forestry Tasmania \$23 million for a controversial proposal to push a new road through pristine rainforests into the heart of the Tarkine – critical habitat for the Tasmanian Devil.

A spokesperson for the group of experts is dismayed by the plight of the Tasmanian Devil and impact the Tarkine road proposal poses for the species' survival in the wild. Dr David Obendorf is a Tasmanian veterinarian, wildlife researcher and member of the Save the Devil Project stakeholder advisory group; he has worked extensively on the devil's plight and has recently co-authored on the Devil Facial Tumour Disease soon to be published in the European Journal of Oncology.

“The Tasmanian Devil is Australia's largest carnivorous marsupial and the iconic symbol of a rapidly declining family of large dasyurids. The realization that we could spend so

much tax-payer and community donations to prevent this unique Tasmanian animal from becoming extinct in the wild and at the same time allow development proposals to proceed into the last stronghold of cancer-free devils is beyond comprehension,” said Dr Obendorf.

“The scientists collectively are very distressed that the Tasmanian government is considering pushing a road into the last refuge of healthy, cancer-free Tasmanian devils, and we are asking with the government of Premier David Bartlett to listen to these concerns and remember the effect of government sanctioned policy on the fate of the thylacine.”

“Science needs to be unfettered by politics. Scientists need to be able to speak openly about their scientific concerns and do so without fear of political interference. Minister Llewellyn’s need to abruptly dismiss the concerns expressed last week by Dr Colette Harmsen was most unfortunate and he should reconsider his motivation behind his put down of Dr Harmsen,” Dr Obendorf said.

For More Information or Comment:- Dr David Obendorf – Ph: (03) 6234 5561 or 0458 647 946

Email: davidobendorf@tassie.net.au