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# TALL POPPY CAMPAIGN

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*Investing in Australia's Future*

**MEDIA RELEASE - EMBARGOED UNTIL 9.30am,**

**Thursday August 21**

## **2008 Tall Poppies of science: Award winners announced**

**Winners of the prestigious 2008 SA Young Tall Poppy Science Awards will be awarded this Thursday August 21.**

Identifying possible causes for Cerebral Palsy, endeavoring to reconstruct the history of the Earth's surface environment, personalizing medicine through gene study and using mathematics to improve the bionic ear... These are just some of the advances in science made by this year's winners. And this is what they'll spend the year talking to high school students about.

Selected on the basis of research achievement and passion for communicating their work, ten scientists under 40 will be recognised with Young Tall Poppy Science awards on Thursday morning (winners listed on page 3).

What makes the Young Tall Poppy Science Awards unique is that instead of winning money or prizes, the scientists win the opportunity to take their research to high school students around SA, and across Australia.

As part of the Tall Poppy Campaign, the Award winners will undertake a program of school visits to inspire a new generation to get passionate about science.

Why? Because the number of students studying chemistry, maths and physics – subjects that feed key areas of workforce demand – are in freefall decline with enrolments now lower than in 1989<sup>1</sup>.

And the issue is a long way from simply upsetting science enthusiasts. With issues like climate change and cancer looming over a generation of young people currently in high school, the need for a science-educated population has never been more relevant.

"The Award winners demonstrate to the next generation that a career in science in Australia can make a real contribution to the health, productivity, sustainability and creativity of our society," says Tall Poppy Campaign Acting Director, Nikki Sullings.

"They will target Year 10 and 11 students who are thinking seriously about their senior subject choices, their tertiary education and future careers," Sullings explains.

"The Young Tall Poppy Science Awards recognise scientific achievers who are in the early stage of their careers and already making discoveries."

"These are not only the brightest young people addressing the crucial issues facing humanity, they are also the best people for the job of inspiring the next generation in science," adds Sullings.



The Tall Poppy Campaign is a project of the Australian Institute of Policy and Science, with support from the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology and each of the 3 South Australian Universities.

The Awards will be presented by the SA Minister for Science and Information Economy, Paul Caica and Robyn Williams, Science Journalist and Radio Broadcaster, ABC Radio National.

Special guests will also include His Excellency, Rear Admiral Kevin Scarce AC CSS RANR, Governor of South Australia, SA Chief Scientist, Dr Ian Chessell, Deputy Chief Defence Scientist, Dr Warren Harch, Vice-Chancellors and Deputy Vice-Chancellors from the 3 South Australian Universities.

**The 2008 SA Young Tall Poppy Science Awards will be held:**

Ayers House  
Brasserie  
North Terrace  
Adelaide  
Thursday August 21  
7.30am – 9.30am

**LIST OF AWARD WINNERS ON FOLLOWING PAGE...**

**Reference**

<sup>1</sup> Australian Council of Deans of Science (2003). 'Is the study of science in decline?', Occasional Paper No. 3, <http://www.acds.edu.au/occas.htm>



## EMBARGOED 2008 SA Young Tall Poppy Science Award Winners

- **Dr Kirsten Benkendorff**

*Senior Lecturer, Flinders University, Marine Biology*

Kirsten is a marine biologist that is currently investigating Southern Australian marine organisms, in particular a local sea snail that has been identified as a source for a potential new medicine for cancer patients. Her research cultivates production of these snails and tests the effectiveness of the snail extract against particular strains of cancer.

- **A/Professor Corey Bradshaw**

*Research Director of Marine Impacts, University of Adelaide, Conservation Ecology*

Corey is a conservation ecologist who uses mathematics and biological data to examine and understand the ways in which species respond to changing environments, changes effected from habitat loss, fragmentation, climate change, over-exploitation and invasive species. His research aim is to provide strong scientific basis for justifying conserving biodiversity.

- **Dr Alison Coates**

*Lecturer, University of South Australia, Health*

Alison is a researcher in health and she is particularly interested in the benefits that certain nutrients, such as omega 3 fatty acids found in fish, have on cardiovascular and metabolic function. Her research aim is to provide information to medical professionals about what type of dietary changes are beneficial for optimal health.

- **Dr Catherine Gibson**

*Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Adelaide, Cerebral Palsy Causation*

Catherine's research is aimed at identifying possible causes for cerebral palsy, the most common major physical disability in childhood. She is investigating how genetics and the environment may interact during pregnancy to cause cerebral palsy in the hope to understand and to possibly prevent this debilitating disorder, for which there is no cure.

- **Dr Galen Halverson**

*Lecturer, University of Adelaide, Geology*

As a geologist, Galen endeavors to reconstruct the history of the Earth's surface environment as recorded in ancient sedimentary rocks. His research aims to understand how Earth came to be the way it is today and how Earth's surface behaves and responds to climate change.

- **Dr Mark McDonnell**

*Research Fellow, Institute for Telecommunications Research, University of South Australia  
Electronic Engineering and Mathematical Neuroscience*

Mark's research uses mathematics to help understand how neurons in the brain communicate and process information using electrical pulses. He is especially interested in our sense of hearing, how the brain converts sounds into these coded electrical pulses and how the brain is able to accurately interpret sounds from this code. His work is particularly important for improving *cochlear implants* or "bionic ears."

- **Dr Megan Mitchell**

*Post Doctoral Research Scientist, University of Adelaide, Reproductive Biology*

Megan's research in reproductive biology looks at how nutrition and the increasing age of first time mothers affects development of the females eggs, and embryos. Her aim is to better understand the mechanisms that determine the quality of the egg and embryo, and how this impacts on the developing pregnancy and subsequent health of the baby after it is born.

- **Dr Michael Sorich**

*Lecturer, University of South Australia, Personalised Medicine*

Michael researches the reasons why medicines will work well for some people but not for others and why some individuals suffer significant side effects to some medicines whilst others have little or no side effects. Understanding how different genes and other biological



molecules in people affect medicine, assists Michael to help improve decisions involving the selection and dosing of medicines for practitioners, hence 'personalised medicine'.

- **Dr Tamath Rainsford**

*Lecturer, The University of Adelaide, Electromagnetics and Biomedical Engineering*

Tamath's research is about applying mathematics to various real world problems, especially those that are medical or biological in nature. She has demonstrated how combining mathematics with the latest medical tools, can potentially create new medical solutions.

- **A/Professor Wei Zhang**

*Head of Molecular Bioprocessing and Bioproducts Laboratory, Flinders University, Bioprocess Engineering & Marine Biotechnology*

Wei teaches how the modern pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries develop and design the production process for making drugs, nutritional and biological products. In conjunction he leads a research team to develop cheaper and cleaner production processes for supplying these products using cells of bacteria, plants and animals.