



9 Sep 08

## Press release: Smart women in the MTSRF

The Smart Women – Smart State Awards 2008 have recognised two researchers funded by the Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility (MTSRF) in north Queensland.

Dr Kirsten Heimann won the award for achievements in research science, while Amanda O'Malley won the inaugural Green Award for her PhD project. Both women are based at James Cook University (JCU) in Townsville.

Fifteen awards were presented at the Smart Women – Smart State ceremony in Brisbane on 2nd September 2008. These awards are well-regarded and this year nominations included women who have made innovative contributions to their communities, those who have excelled at secondary school and university level, as well as those working in industry, business, the community and the public sector.

“Through these awards, the State is valuing the fact that professional women are playing major roles in shaping Queensland’s future,” said Dr Heimann. “I’m honoured that my work has been recognised in this way, and I hope this inspires Queensland women to enter careers in technical fields such as science.”

In addition to her busy research and university teaching schedule, Dr Heimann is the Director of JCU's North Queensland Algal Identification/Culturing Facility, the world's first such facility to focus on tropical microalgae. Her groundbreaking research is internationally recognised and has applications in the development of biodiesel, climate change and human health.

Among other projects, Dr Heimann is currently investigating the linkages between human health, climate change and dinoflagellates (a special group of marine microalgae). Preliminary results from this MTSRF-funded study indicate that climate change could increase the incidence of dinoflagellate-caused ciguatera poisoning - also known as tropical reef-fish poisoning - in subtropical regions of Queensland.

Ms O'Malley was also delighted with her win. Her research has shown that habitat alteration and climate change are having negative effects on the pink nose turtle, a recently-described freshwater species known only from the Johnstone River, near Innisfail in north Queensland.

“Most of Queensland’s freshwater ecosystems are under pressure, yet their proper functioning is vital for the health of the environment as a whole,” she said. “This kind of basic research is important because it will help us manage these ecosystems better.”

Ms Sheriden Morris congratulated all the winners on behalf of the MTSRF. “These awards have highlighted the contribution women are making in technical and scientific fields, especially in north Queensland. The MTSRF is proud to be facilitating capacity-building in the region,” said Ms Morris.

The \$40 million MTSRF is part of the Australian government's Commonwealth Environment Research Facility program, and is administered in north Queensland by the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre. The MTSRF aims to provide solution science that will help ensure sustainable use and management of north Queensland's key environmental assets: the Great Barrier Reef and its catchments, rainforests of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, and the Torres Strait.

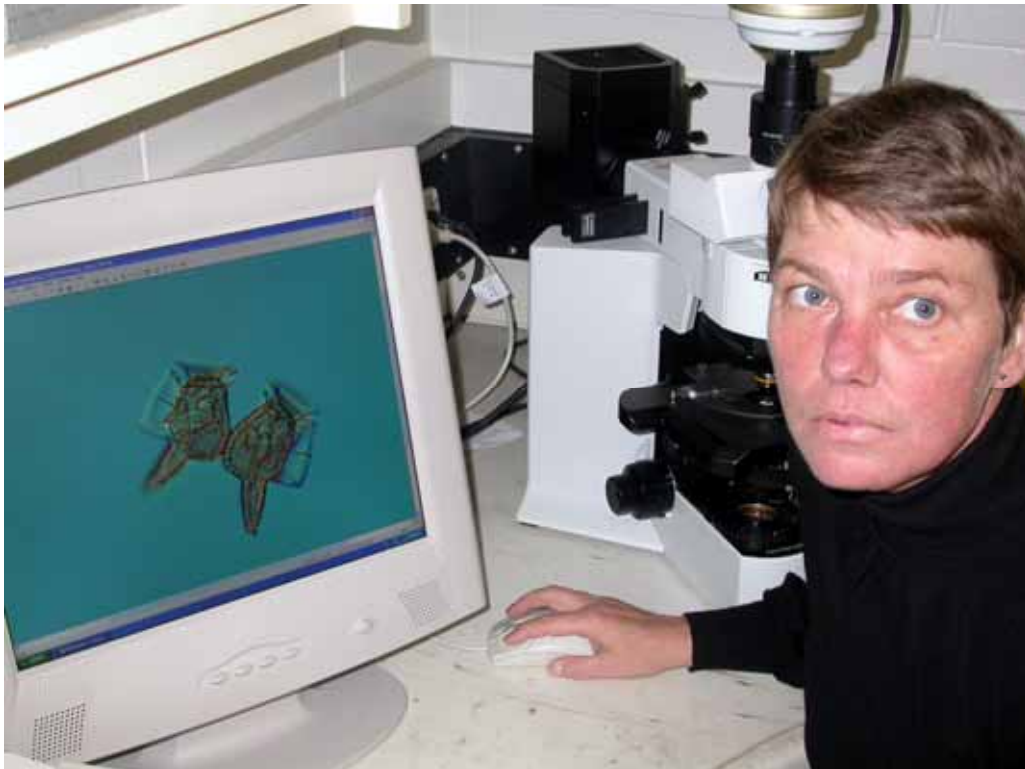
***For more information please contact:***

**Dr Kirsten Heimann**, phone 0422 208 577, [Kirsten.Heimann@jcu.edu.au](mailto:Kirsten.Heimann@jcu.edu.au)

**Ms Amanda O'Malley**, [amanda.omalley@jcu.edu.au](mailto:amanda.omalley@jcu.edu.au)

**Ms Sheriden Morris**, Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility, phone 07 4050 7400, [sheriden.morris@rrrc.org.au](mailto:sheriden.morris@rrrc.org.au)

***Image available for use with this text:***



Dr Kirsten Heimann working on a toxin-producing dinoflagellate (*Dinophysis caudata*) in the laboratory at the North Queensland Algal Identification/Culture Facility, JCU. Photo courtesy of Stanley Hudson/NQAIF.

For more information about the **Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility**, please see [www.rrrc.org.au](http://www.rrrc.org.au)