



18 November 2008

## Press release: International scientists meet in the Daintree to help save biodiversity from climate change

A meeting of world leaders in the field of biodiversity and climate change is being held in north Queensland's Daintree region this week. The meeting has been convened by A/Prof Steve Williams, Director of the Centre for Tropical Biodiversity and Climate Change (CTBCC) at James Cook University, which is rapidly becoming a nationally and internationally significant research centre on climate change impacts.

Twenty-one international and Australian experts are working to help address the significant threat that climate change poses for biodiversity worldwide - including Queensland's Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, which is recognised as a global biodiversity hotspot.

Conservation of this biodiversity is essential if these ecosystems are to be resilient to climate change, and to continue to provide goods and services – like clean air and drinking water – to the communities that depend upon them.

“We already know that climate change is increasing the risk of extinction for many species, even here in north Queensland where they're relatively protected from other human influences,” said Steve. “What conservation managers need now is a way to quantify this extinction risk.”

“Our role as scientists is to determine which species, habitats and ecosystems will be most vulnerable, and exactly which aspects of their biology determines their vulnerability. The next step will be to come up with options to manage this vulnerability - things we can actually do to help adaptation and minimise climate change impacts on our irreplaceable biodiversity.”

The experts are aiming to integrate scientific data on a wide range of factors to produce robust estimates of how vulnerable each species will be to extinction as the climate changes. This will enable managers to gauge the relative risk for each species and assign conservation effort accordingly.

“Conservation resources are always limited, yet the task of conserving species and ecosystems is only going to get more demanding as the climate changes,” said Steve. “Hopefully our approach will help managers to get maximum ‘bang for buck’ by prioritising vulnerable species, and avoiding wasting resources on species that will be able to cope on their own.”

“It's easy to be overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the impacts of climate change,” said Sheriden Morris, CEO of the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, and a co-sponsor of the meeting. “But this is a great example of how science can contribute to solving some of our environmental problems, in this case helping to achieve the most effective possible conservation outcome.”



The CTBCC is now hosting the National Adaptation Science Network for Terrestrial Biodiversity – a new national initiative that aims to develop the best possible science to adapt to a changing climate and minimise any negative impacts on Australia’s environment. The Daintree meeting is a first step along a very complex path to achieving that aim.

“North Queensland is becoming recognised as a global hub of tropical environmental expertise,” added Sheriden. “There’s growing awareness that the knowledge and tools we’re developing here – like this comprehensive method of assessing vulnerability to extinction – can be exported and applied for the benefit of tropical environments worldwide.”

Andrew Maclean, executive director of the Wet Tropics Management Authority, said the Authority was pleased to be sponsoring the workshop. “We already know that climate change represents a major threat to the health and integrity of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area,” he said.

“A thorough knowledge of the likely responses of ecosystems to climate change is important to ensure management effort is well-targeted. I am optimistic that this workshop will yield results that will be of real value for policy and management,” he added.

The Daintree meeting has also been sponsored by the ARC Network for Earth System Science and the Daintree Discovery Centre.

***For more information or to organise media interviews during the week, please contact:***

**Mr John Courtenay**, phone +61 7 4097 6752, 0417 728 003

**A/Prof Steve Williams**, Centre For Tropical Biodiversity & Climate Change, James Cook University, phone +61 7 4781 5580, [stephen.williams@jcu.edu.au](mailto:stephen.williams@jcu.edu.au)

**Ms Sheriden Morris**, CEO of the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, phone +61 7 4050 7400, [sheriden.morris@rrrc.org.au](mailto:sheriden.morris@rrrc.org.au), [www.rrrc.org.au](http://www.rrrc.org.au)

**Mr Andrew Maclean**, CEO of the Wet Tropics Management Authority, phone +61 7 4052 0501, [andrew.maclean@epa.qld.gov.au](mailto:andrew.maclean@epa.qld.gov.au)

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