University of Tasmania student ready to take on world’s youngest scientific minds in LA

A first-year Bachelor of Science student from the University of Tasmania will test his soil remediation theory against the world’s youngest and brightest minds at a global competition this month.

Eighteen-year-old Lachlan Dick, who majors in chemistry and geology, will represent Australia as the only Tasmanian competing in the INTEL International Science and Engineering Fair being held in Los Angeles between 14–19 May.

The annual fair attracts about 1,800 of the world’s most promising young scientists, engineers and mathematicians, entered as finalists in the competition after participating at local and national events.

Departing for Los Angeles this Thursday (12 May), Lachlan will present his project, Salinity Solutions, which investigates the remediation of salt-affected soil, at the competition.

“Soil affected by sodium can negatively impact the growth of plants and this is a huge problem globally, wasting large areas of land which could potentially be used for feeding the world,” Lachlan said.

“The inspiration behind my project was a desire to use science in applying a practical solution to a worldwide problem.

“I investigated whether adding a nutrient (calcium chloride) to sodium-affected soil could remediate it, and found that introducing this compound improved the growth rates and biomass of potatoes which I planted as part of the experiment.

“My project demonstrates that soil remediation may be possible and practical; intervention could improve agricultural outcomes in damaged soils and help address the increasing incidences of loss of arable soils to salinity.”

As a Year 12 student at Hellyer College last year, Lachlan was named Young Engineer in the University’s Science Investigation Awards (North-West), allowing him to progress to the statewide Science Teachers Association of Tasmania competition,
where he placed first in the senior secondary level and was also awarded Best Agricultural Investigation.

Lachlan then entered the BHP Billiton CSIRO Science and Engineering competition held in February. He was one of 26 finalists and was subsequently chosen to represent Australia in the overseas competition after submitting one of the top investigation projects.

“In Los Angeles my investigation paper and an accompanying poster I have designed will be presented to a number of judges and assessed. While there I am really looking forward to seeing the other projects and engaging with other competitors from all corners of the world.

“I feel very privileged to be representing my country at such a prestigious event and I am humbled to have been chosen,” Lachlan said.

Professor Brian Yates, Dean of the University’s Faculty of Science Engineering and Technology, congratulated Lachlan and wished him every success at the competition.

“The University of Tasmania is excited to be helping Lachlan forge a future career in science, and I commend him on the many remarkable achievements he has already made to date,” Professor Yates said.

“It is also heartening to see local students continuing to be inspired to explore their passion in the STEM disciplines through our world-class institution.

“We wish Lachlan all the very best as he competes against the brightest young minds from across the globe in this prestigious annual competition.”

A second University of Tasmania student, Sharni Cox, who is studying a combined Bachelor of Business/Bachelor of Science degree, will also travel to Los Angeles as an observer of the competition.

Sharni secured the opportunity after being awarded an Indigenous STEM award presented by the CSIRO last year.

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