

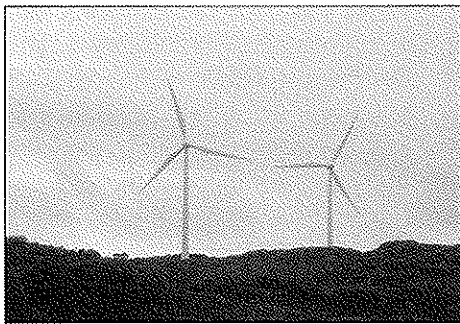
RESEARCH

THE SUSTAINING GONDWANA INITIATIVE

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A new research programme, focusing on WA's south coast, is just getting under way at Curtin University.

Curtin University is one of five new international Academic Partners of the US-based Alcoa Foundation. The university has been awarded a grant over five years under the Alcoa Foundation's Conservation and Sustainability Fellowship Program, with an additional contribution by Curtin. The aims of the program are to support and foster sustainability across the globe and to improve education in sustainability and conservation issues.



Albany wind farm - providing a viable energy option in some of the more remote parts of the State. Photo: J. Majer

Curtin's research program is focusing on sustainability and conservation in the south coast region of WA, between Walpole and Esperance. Titled 'Sustaining Gondwana: Harnessing local, place-based knowledge for sustainable outcomes', the project will ultimately document and enhance economic, environmental and social sustainability initiatives in the region.

A series of six postdoctoral fellows are being appointed, with two joining the initiative in the first year, two at the end of the first year and two who are yet to be appointed.

In the autumn of 2006, Dr Alan Marshall began the Ecomimicry Project which aims to draw inspiration from the unique ecology of the Great Southern region of WA to design technologies and practices based upon the local wildlife and the local landscape. He has already held a series of workshops across the region. The second inaugural fellow, Dr Amma Buckley, also commenced in March 2006 with a project focussing on the links between the social and the environmental in the Great Southern, concentrating on the Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve and its surrounding communities.

The third fellow, Adam Dunn, was appointed in the spring of 2006, starting a project on modelling the fragmentation and biodiversity of the ecosystems of the Great Southern. He uses layers of landscape information to build predictive computer models of the significant environmental issues facing the region. Finally, Dr Robyn Mayes joined the program in mid-October 2006. The overarching aim of her research is to improve our understanding of the strengths and limitations of community identity. She is particularly working with the communities of the Shire of Ravensthorpe, at present undergoing considerable and rapid change with the advent of large-scale mining operations in the area.

The final two fellows will be appointed towards the end of this year. One of these will probably concentrate on energy

issues in the south coast region and the other may assist senior researchers to draw together findings to provide an overview of conservation and sustainability issues in the region under investigation.

These studies, along with others not mentioned here, should provide a comprehensive picture of how the relatively underpopulated south coast region is developing and the threats to its natural and social environment. Importantly, it will provide recommendations for harmonising the inevitable development of this increasingly important area with conservation of the vast natural resources and features that exist there.

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Esperance - an interface between urbanisation, agriculture and the natural environment. Photo: J. Majer