

EMBARGOED UNTIL 11AM THURSDAY 2 AUGUST 2007

CLIMATE CHANGE-HEALTH EXPERT GRANTED \$4 MILLION

An internationally respected scientist from The Australian National University has been awarded four million dollars to research the links between climate change, environmental factors and human health.

Professor Tony McMichael, Director of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at ANU, has been named as an Australia Fellow by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). This means he'll receive \$800,000 annually in research funding over the next five years.

"At ANU we pride ourselves on being home to some of the finest researchers in Australia and the world," Vice-Chancellor Professor Ian Chubb said. "Professor McMichael is a first-class scientist whose work has important implications for the future of humanity. I commend him on this fine achievement."

The NHMRC said that Australia Fellowships recognise "groundbreaking world leaders in their field, responsible for creating some of the greatest medical breakthroughs in the world".

Professor McMichael gained international attention in the 1980s for his work highlighting the child health risks posed by the use of lead in industrial processes and commercial products, such as house paint. More recently, he has played a leadership role in the assessment of health impacts for the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. His own research has entailed collaborations with an international network of scientists studying how a warmer planet would affect people's health and wellbeing.

"This award is both a great honour and responsibility," Professor McMichael said. "There is a resurgent interest in how environmental conditions, especially our escalating impacts on the natural world, affect human health. Climate change now looms as an urgent topic for research. We need full understanding of the risks from climate change in order to develop effective national and international policies."

With his Australia Fellowship funding, Professor McMichael will extend his research on how climatic variations affect health risks. This will include studies in Australia and neighbouring countries to identify changes in risks of infections and other diseases due to ongoing climate change. Particular attention will be paid to rural Australia, where the prospect of longer-term drying raises many questions about health risks and the adaptive responses that communities and government should undertake.

Professor McMichael and colleagues will also pursue further research into the environmental influences on autoimmune diseases, including multiple sclerosis and childhood (type 1) diabetes. The roles of solar ultraviolet and vitamin D in reducing risks of these diseases is a major focus of this research.

The Australia Fellowships were announced in Melbourne today by Federal Health Minister Tony Abbott.

ANU Media Office: Simon Couper 02 6125 4171, 0416 249 241

ANU MEDIA OFFICE:

Jane O'Dwyer
T: (02) 6125 5001
M: 0416 249 231

Amanda Morgan
T: (02) 6125 5575
M: 0416 249 245

Simon Couper
T: (02) 6125 4171
M: 0416 249 241

W: www.anu.edu.au/media/