

**Official opening ceremony of the “Devil Island” Project, Tasmania, May 2008**  
*Cerimonia ufficiale di apertura del Progetto “Isola del Diavolo”, Tasmania, maggio 2008*

Tasmanian Devils have been in peril since the late 1990s and are facing extinction in the wild in ten to twenty years from a cancer, if nothing changes. Labelled the Devil Facial Tumour Disease (DFTD), it is transmitted only by biting between Devils.

The Tasmanian Emu and the Tasmanian Tiger are already extinct and now the Tasmanian Devil becomes another endangered Australian marsupial along with the Black Footed Rock Wallaby, the

Northern Hairy Nosed Wombat and Gilbert’s Potoroo.

A breeding programme designed to help save the Devil saw 48 sent to four mainland zoos. Unfortunately, the breeding results were poor with only 13 joeys born in 2007. Tasmania is the last natural refuge of the Devil, since it died out on the mainland of Australia some 600 years ago<sup>1,2</sup>.

I decided that a solution to the breeding problems



David Llewellyn, MP, Minister for Primary Industries and Water, officially opens the project



Some of the 'Devil Islanders' team members at the official opening, sporting their London marathon medals

*Left to right: Andrew Woodard, Debbie Gardam, Maureen Englefield, Bruce Englefield, Fiona Hoskin, Joanna Stronach, Belinda Woodard*

and the DFTD transmission was to build a secure, double-fenced extensive enclosure. Devils can breed naturally whilst protected from DFTD transmission by two fences, six metres apart, two metres high and buried 1 metre into the ground. Strong in principle support was given to this idea by government



Devil Island, Bicheno, Tasmania

agencies, however, initially, there was no financial support available.

My wife Maureen and I decided to donate the use of 28 acres (11 hectares) of our land at East Coast Natureworld and call it the 'Devil Island' Project. We formed the 'Devil Islanders', a team of twelve Tasmanians to raise funds to pay for the project and to raise the profile of the DFTD.

On April 13<sup>th</sup> 2008, ten of the team, with an average age of 55, ran the Flora Marathon in London. Fastest runner was under four hours and all



Running free: the first devil released into the enclosure



completed in under seven hours, including those of us well into the grandparent generation, such as my wife and myself. We raised over Aus\$45,000.

The project has received tremendous sponsorship from institutions such as Australia Zoo Wildlife Warriors - home of the late Steve Irwin, the crocodile hunter, Rio Tinto, Gunns, Australia Pacific Touring and Shaw Contracting.

On May 18<sup>th</sup> 2008, in the presence of numerous supporters and well-wishers, the Devil Island Project was formally opened by Hon David Llewellyn, MP, Minister for Primary Industries and Water.

Twelve disease-free Devils, taken from the wild, were released as the initial inhabitants of 'Devil Island'. Anyone wishing to be involved in this huge conservation effort or make a donation, please see [www.devilislandproject.com](http://www.devilislandproject.com)

The first 'Devil Island' is seen very much as a prototype and if successful there are plans to build up to another 20. This figure of 20 would be the 'ideal world' for behaviourist Dr David Sinn working on the Save the Tasmanian Devil programme. Already huge opportunities for research have been opened up with the 'Devil Island' stocked

with wild devils<sup>3</sup>. Much will depend on Government funding. The Devil Islanders team have already decided to continue with their fundraising efforts to build more 'Devil Islands' and with the present project working well for both the devils and keepers the future looks very promising.

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## References

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2. McGlashan ND, Obendorf DL, Harington JS. Update on the devil facial tumour in Tasmania. *Eur J Oncol* 2007; 12 (2) 75-80.
3. Frankham R. Genetic adaptation to captivity in species conservation programs. *Mol Ecol* 2008; 17: 325-33.



**David Llewellyn, MP**

Minister for Primary Industries and Water

Wednesday, 21 May 2008

## Tasmanian devil now listed as Endangered Species

### *Il diavolo della Tasmania incluso da oggi nell'elenco delle Specie a Rischio*

The upgrading of the Tasmanian devil to Endangered status under the State's Threatened Species Protection Act highlights the severe nature of the disease threatening the species. We are committed to finding an answer and saving the Tasmanian devil for Tasmanians and the world.

Encouraging progress is continuing to be made by wildlife and disease experts from a range of institutions working in partnership.

The upgrading in status from Vulnerable to Endangered, recommended to me by the Scientific Advisory Committee, reflects the reductions in the devil population resulting from Devil Facial Tumour Disease. The order has now been gazetted, and the new status becomes official today.

We recognise the efforts of the many wildlife and disease experts from local, national and international organisations that are working on the State and Commonwealth Government-funded Save the Tasmanian Devil Program and partnership programs. These efforts have led to some very important findings: identifying the transmissible nature of the disease and furthering understanding of the immune system of the species.

We are developing and implementing an Insurance Strategy which has established captive populations around the country, implementing wild management trials to attempt to render wild populations secure. We are encouraged by recent results which are showing that some devils from western Tasmania have developed antibodies to DFTD. While it is still very early days, discoveries such as this provide hope that the disease may be managed in the longer term and that devils with genetic diversity will survive it.

We must caution, however, that there are no single, simple solutions, and that scientific work has to proceed carefully and systematically. The disease we are fighting is one of the few cancers in the world known to be directly transmissible. This upgrading really reminds us of what we are up against in our efforts to ensure the ongoing survival of the species in the wild.

Our Government and the Commonwealth Government have provided substantial and ongoing funding to establish and operate the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program, which has initiated partnerships with scientific and wildlife experts from Tasmania, mainland Australia and overseas, as well as with local wildlife parks and zoos on the mainland.

There has also been financial and other support coming from a range of businesses, concerned individuals and community groups. That support has been encouraging, and highlights the fact that the most effective programs require ongoing support and commitment from all levels of government and the community.

That is why it is valuable to have a variety of organisations, individuals, government, and wildlife and disease experts involved in a range of areas. These diverse groups are united in their common goal of seeing the ongoing survival of the Tasmanian devil in the wild. Mr Englefield and his team have undertaken their own efforts to raise the funding and build the Devil Island facility, and are now working in partnership with the State Government's Save the Tasmanian Devil Program in helping to build up a viable insurance population of the species.

If required, these animals could be utilised in the long-term to help re-establish Tasmanian devil numbers in the wild.

The Department of Primary Industries and Water has entered into an agreement under the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program for the Devil Island Project to manage up to 30 disease-free devils within a large enclosure as part of the Insurance Population Strategy. The Devil Island Project is the first attempt in the world to manage Tasmanian devils within extensive areas.

The Department will oversee the management of the animals held on 'Devil Island' in close co-operation with the private sector. We view this as the first step towards managing larger populations in extensive areas. It will be valuable experience in informing conservation managers as to what is possible.

For the latest information on efforts underway to assist the Tasmanian devil and how to help, visit:  
[www.tassiedevil.com.au](http://www.tassiedevil.com.au)