Major boost to affordable student housing

In a major boost to affordable housing for Tasmania's tertiary students, nearly 800 new apartments will be built by the University of Tasmania over the next two years.

The initiative, jointly announced this morning by University of Tasmania Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Rathjen, Member for Franklin Julie Collins, representing the Federal Minister for Sustainability Mr Tony Burke, and the State Minister for Human Services and Community Development, Cassy O'Connor, will see 770 self-contained apartments constructed under the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS). Total value of the project is $90 million.

“This development represents an exciting new phase in the University’s ability to meet the accommodation needs of our growing student population,” Prof Rathjen said.

"Not only will those be a boon for the University, but also importantly it is another large investment in Tasmania."

The University estimates that more than 8,500 students leave home to study at UTAS each year. These students come from overseas, interstate and regional and rural areas within Tasmania.

“The NRAS apartments will add another accommodation option to our existing diverse on-campus and off-campus residential communities," he said.

As is well known, achievement in higher education is a good indicator of later success in life. Socio-economic disadvantage, including the availability of suitable, affordable housing,
presents a significant barrier to many students accessing tertiary study.

“A key feature of the new development will be to greatly increase the stock of affordable housing for students and, more generally, will help relieve pressure on the supply of affordable housing in areas of identified high demand.”

Prof Rathjen said that the NRAS initiative will also provide another UTAS-driven stimulus to Tasmania’s construction industry.

“This announcement comes as construction work begins on the $45 million Institute for Antarctic and Marine Studies building at the PW2 site at Salamanca and construction proceeds on stage two of the $90 million Medical Science Two building project in Hobart's CBD.

“We are also investing heavily in advanced online systems to enhance the way the University teaches and does business. For students, the SLIMS project will greatly improve online self-service access and MyLO 2012 will augment the eLearning experience.”

Under the NRAS agreement with the State Government, the University will reserve 45 apartments across campuses for the most disadvantaged students – those from suburbs and regions identified as being in the lowest 25 per cent of socio-economic status. The University will assist these students by significantly subsidising their accommodation costs. In addition, ten per cent of all apartments will be fully accessible to students with a disability.

The NRAS project will also bring significant economic benefits to the State during construction and also in the ability to attract new students. The State Government has committed $17.6 million in support while it is expected that the Federal Government’s contribution will be more than $55 million over the 10 years of the NRAS program.

Prof Rathjen said the University would now consider the placement of the housing according to highest need. Construction is expected to start in 2012 with all apartments to be completed by mid-2014.