

New appointment delivers opportunities for New Zealand

James Renwick, an acknowledged expert on Southern Hemisphere climate variability and change, will join the 18-member committee that provides scientific guidance to the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP). Dr Renwick is Associate Professor of Physical Geography at Victoria University of Wellington, and a Past President of New Zealand Association of Scientists.

The WCRP facilitates studies of the global atmosphere, oceans, sea ice, land ice, and land surface to help understand and predict variations in the climate system and how human activity is causing the climate to change. It helps set the agenda for climate research programmes carried out around the world.

Dr Renwick says that becoming a member of the WCRP's Joint Scientific Committee is a great personal honour and an opportunity to highlight climate change issues in the Southern Hemisphere.

'The impact the southern oceans and Antarctica have on the global climate system is a huge field and one that is comparatively understudied. Being part of this group is an opportunity to put a Southern Hemisphere focus on what the WCRP is promoting.'

Dr Renwick, who will attend his first meeting of the Joint Scientific Committee in Brazil in May, says joining the group will provide a forum to interact with world leaders in different aspects of climate research and allow him to bring the latest research back to Victoria.

He is also one of four Victoria University scientists working as lead authors and review editors for Working Group 1 of the next Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, which is due out early in 2014. He is co-authoring the final chapter called 'Climate phenomena and their relevance for future regional climate change'. Other lead authors from Victoria are Professor Tim Naish from the Antarctic Research Centre (Chapter 5 lead author), Professor David Frame from the New Zealand Climate Change Research Institute (Chapter 1 lead author) and Professor David Wratt, Chief Scientist, Climate, at NIWA and an Adjunct Professor in the New Zealand Climate Change Research Institute (Chapter 14 review editor, and IPCC Bureau member). The four scientists recently attended the final meeting of lead authors for Working Group 1 in Hobart, where, Dr Renwick says, Victoria was one of the best represented universities.

'This was a gathering of top climate scientists from around the globe to assess and summarise the state of climate change science. The fact that Victoria was one of the most well represented universities is testimony to the calibre of climate change research being done here.'

Dr Renwick says that the 5th Assessment Report being prepared for the IPCC will contain greater detail and new information about the way the world's climate is changing. It will also include a summary of research taking place to allow scientists to make near-term predictions of climate variations.

'It would make a huge difference if we could predict variations more accurately for the next few decades and forecast which periods are likely to warm faster, and which more slowly, than the long-term upward trend.'

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