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Citation for the 2013 Vice Chancellor's Distinguished Community Engagement Award

Prof Martin Hill and the Biological Control Research Group

Mr Chancellor,

The Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Community Engagement Award is presented annually to a Rhodes University staff member who has dedicated his or her time, skills, knowledge and expertise to forge mutually beneficial, respectful and socially significant initiatives and partnerships with our local community.

Mr Chancellor, I have the honour of presenting to you this morning Prof Martin Hill and the Biological Control Research Group of the Department of Zoology and Entomology for the 2013 Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Community Engagement Medal in recognition of their truly exceptional community engagement work in in Biological Control.

The Biological Control Research Group (BCRG) in the Department of Zoology and Entomology focuses on understanding the ecology, biology and the management of invasive aquatic weeds. Invasive aquatic weeds, both floating and submerged, continue to pose a significant threat to the integrity of South African aquatic ecosystems and the quantity and quality of potable water, costing the government millions of Rands to control each year. The traditional mechanical methods of control are both expensive and generally not that effective. The work of this Group comprises the development of biological control methods for these invasive plants, which can then be implemented by various stakeholders, from governmental organisations, to local communities and private landowners.

Their approach, which entails breeding and deploying specific insects, is a far more cost effective and successful method of control for the majority of water weeds. Their expertise has been called upon to assist in the control of these weeds beyond our borders, throughout Africa, and into Europe, the USA, and as far away as Australia and New Zealand. But the Biological Control Research Group believes that their research should go beyond the laboratory and out into the community, where it should be implemented through open communication and the transfer of appropriate skills and technology. They maintain that biological control, and the science behind it, has the ability to empower local communities to manage their own natural resources. To this end, this group runs a fully accredited Weed Biological Control Short Course through Rhodes University which teaches community members the basic tenets of invasive weed ecology and biological control. Further, they run the Disabled People's Weed Biological Control Short Course in partnership with the Grahamstown Area Distress Relief Association (GADRA) with the ultimate goal of providing trained individuals with job opportunities. Their mass-rearing programs, in which biological control agents are cultivated for study and distribution, have been run in partnership with the Working for Water initiative, SAEON Elwandle Node, GADRA, and local Grahamstown schools. Their mass-rearing programs have employed people with disabilities from the Grahamstown local community to assist in the general maintenance of the mass-rearing the facility, as well as the collection of insects for release. This involvement of people with disabilities is so critically important as it helps affirm and advance the humanity and dignity of those in our society who are relegated into oblivion. Local schools are actively involved in the work of this Group. For example, a mass-rearing programme has been initiated at Ntsika Secondary School, where biological control agents for water hyacinth, South Africa's worst aquatic weed, and agents for various *cactus* species, will be mass reared for release around the country. Additionally, the research group has expanded their project beyond the science of biological control to demonstrate that, by using the appropriate techniques, an ordinary person is also able to play an active role in the production and distribution of bio-control agents, ultimately enabling anyone to take responsibility for the control of invasive alien weeds in South Africa.

Their Biology Internship programme run in collaboration with Victoria Girls High School, Graeme College and Ntsika Secondary School encourages environmental stewardship in our local community, improving the quality of young and aspiring science graduates and initiate a positive and productive relationship between a tertiary institution and school learners.

Through careful integration of their research with community engagement, this Group's outstanding work amply demonstrates that Community Engagement, Research and Teaching & Learning form one rich continuum where one benefits from and enriches the other two.

The reciprocal nature of their work has meant both the University and the broader community of Grahamstown/iRhini have benefitted from their engagement initiatives. Professor Bernard, the Dean of Science, in support of the team's nomination writes

> 'Professor Hill and his group undertake basic research in applied fields and the new knowledge generated contributes to solving pressing environmental and agricultural issues which will improve the quality of life for people in our country. In this work he has created employment and training opportunities for disabled members of our community and learning opportunities for local learners. All of this done without fanfare, at little or no cost to the university and for the best possible reasons. Professor Hill and his group are wonderful examples of the positive contribution that we can make towards change in our country.'

Mr Chancellor, I have the honour to request you to present the 2013 Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Community Engagement Medal to Prof Martin Hill and the Biological Control Research Group.