PARASITOID WASPS AND A BREATH-TEST FOR DISEASE WIN FAMELAB 2016!

Congratulations to Erinn Fagan-Jeffries from The University of Adelaide, whose brilliant horror-film tale of parasitoid wasp larvae emerging from caterpillars was declared winner of FameLab Australia 2016 at a sparkling event in the Western Australian Museum on Thursday May 5th.

Ms Fagan-Jeffries is researching parasitoid wasps (Microgastrinae) whose larvae consume their host caterpillars, making them useful as biological control agents. They can reduce caterpillar pests in crops such as potatoes without affecting the ecosystem, resulting in fewer insecticides and more environmentally sustainable crop production.

The Runner-up, Noushin Nasiri from the Australian National University, is developing a fingerprint sized biosensor covered in nanoparticles that detects disease in human breath. The Audience Choice winner, Lucy Weaver from CSIRO, Melbourne, is using smart polymers to purify salty waste water.
“It’s a huge privilege to be able to represent Australia at the international FameLab competition. We have world class scientists and science communicators in this country and being able to share the wonder of science with people is an amazing experience,” said Erinn.

Erinn will be Australia’s representative at the international FameLab competition at the Cheltenham Times Science Festival in early June, up against scientists from more than 25 countries.

“We received a record number of applications for FameLab this year - a sign that scientists are actively seeking ways to tell the story of new research and discovery. Last night the 12 finalists entertained, engaged, and inspired the audience in every area from chemistry and metallurgy to astrophysics and taxonomy. As a result the judges faced an incredibly difficult decision - but Erinn won through on all our criteria of content, clarity and charisma,” said Helen O’Neil, the British Council’s Director in Australia.

“We will be following Erinn’s journey at the Cheltenham Science Festival next month as she joins winners from around the world for the international competition. She will be a great representative of Australian talent in science,” said Ms O’Neil.

FameLab is the British Council’s international science communication competition and Australia is one of more than 25 participating countries. It is a training program in a competition format to get people talking about science, technology, engineering and maths. Applicants have three minutes to present a concept from their field of study to a panel of judges. The judges look for somebody who can shine in content, clarity and charisma - it has to be scientifically accurate, clear to understand and presented with a wink and a smile.

The national final was hosted by ABC’s Robyn Williams and the judges were Helen O’Neil (Country Director, British Council Australia), Renae Sayers (Planetary Science Outreach, Curtin University) and Professor Mark Cassidy (Centre for Offshore Foundation Systems, UWA and 2015 Western Australian Scientist of the Year).

Distinguished guests included the Honourable John Day (MLA, Minister for Health, Culture and the Arts); Her Excellency Menna Rawlings (the British High Commissioner to Australia); Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson AO (Governor of Western Australia); Dr Chris Smith (Naked Scientists, Cambridge University); Professor Lyn Beazley AO (former Chief Scientist of WA) and Alec Coles OBE (CEO, Western Australian Museum).

WINNER: Erinn Fagan Jeffries, The University of Adelaide
RUNNER UP: Noushin Nasiri, Australian National University
AUDIENCE’S CHOICE: Lucy Weaver, CSIRO, Melbourne

The scientists are available for interview. High resolution photographs are available

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