

Media Release
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U.K. EXPERT URGES AUSTRALIANS TO TAKE GEOSCIENCE EDUCATION TO A NEW LEVEL - “BEYOND DINOSAURS AND VOLCANOES”

Australians are to be urged later this month to move their thinking beyond dinosaurs and volcanoes when it comes to appreciating just how much their modern day lives are being impacted by the geosciences.

But the environment for achieving such a step-change in public education will rest with the sector itself better appreciating how to “simplify” geoscience so it can be understood and appreciated by the general public.

The push for education reform will be made at an international forum in Adelaide this month to be addressed by one of the BBC’s foremost environmental documentary producers, geologist and communicator, Professor Iain Stewart, whose Rise of the Continents and numerous other video series are internationally acclaimed.

“Alongside complex scientific and technical challenges is the problem that, to most people – beyond dinosaurs and volcanoes – the geological world is unknown territory,” Professor Stewart said.

“That unfamiliarity presents difficulties for professional geoscientists communicating to decision-makers, politicians and the wider public, what they do, what they know and how that is impacting society,” he said.

“Equally, developing public participation strategies that effectively engage with citizens, communities and stakeholder groups requires geoscientists to better appreciate what the public knows and what they have concerns about. “

Professor Stewart said that in that context, how the sector promoted geology to the next generation of wannabe scientists and engineers would be crucial to the success of reaching into the education system to enthuse and inspire young students about Planet Earth, how it works and what that means for society.

He warned that the predominance of the internet and the online media landscape means that the conventional broadcast and education environment is changing. Geoscience communicators had to learn to make the most of these changes in order to ‘sell’ geology in the commercial marketplace, particularly in relation to contested societal issues.

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“The message from social science is that scientists need to switch from conveying ‘matters of fact’ to non-technical audiences, to developing dialogues around ‘matters of concern’,” Professor Stewart said.

He noted that geotourism was a burgeoning industry worldwide but was subject to both great promise and numerous pitfalls in acting as an educator for geosciences.

As Director of the Sustainable Earth Institute, School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of Plymouth in the UK, Professor Stewart will be a keynote speaker during a ‘Big Issues’ summit day at the inaugural four day convention of the Australia Geoscience Council, being held in Adelaide from October 15 during Earth Science Week 2018.

More than 1,000 delegates are expected in Adelaide for the forum, to include an address on Monday October 15 by renowned US academic, Professor Matthew Huber from the Department of Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences at Purdue University, Indiana, on the significance of past climate changes.

Professor Stewart said it was obvious geoscience education needed to adopt new modes of communication.

“Geological issues are increasingly intruding on the everyday lives of ordinary people,” he said.

“Whether it be the exploration and extraction of hydrocarbons or mineral resources, deep injection of waters for geothermal power, or the underground storage of carbon dioxide and radioactive waste, many communities across the country are being confronted with controversial geological interventions under their backyard.

“We need, as a sector, to educate and help communities understand what we do and why.”

During his Conference visit, Professor Stewart will coordinate the Santos Geoscience Education workshop for science teachers, exploring how geology can be applied to sustainable development issues, and how this ‘sustainable geoscience’ might be integrated into the school and university curriculum.

Other key areas of attention at the Australian Geoscience Council Convention (AGCC 2018) will be better balancing out the country’s mining boom and bust cycles, the better management of our energy generation, feedstocks and energy security, and promoting business and social growth opportunities across the undeveloped footprint of northern Australia.

The *Big Issues and Ideas* day on Tuesday October 16 is designed to highlight the fundamental role that Geoscience has as a major field of science throughout the Australasian-Pacific region.

For more information, visit www.agcc.org.au.

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