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Six Curtin University finalists announced for Premier's Science Awards

MEDIA RELEASE

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Six Curtin University researchers have been named as finalists for the prestigious Premier's Science Awards 2018, including two leading experts in their fields in the coveted Scientist of the Year category.

[John Curtin Distinguished Professor Phil Bland](https://staffportal.curtin.edu.au/staff/profile/view/P.Bland)

(<https://staffportal.curtin.edu.au/staff/profile/view/P.Bland>), from the School of Earth and Planetary Sciences at Curtin University and [John Curtin Distinguished Professor Peter Newman](https://staffportal.curtin.edu.au/staff/profile/view/P.Newman) (<https://staffportal.curtin.edu.au/staff/profile/view/P.Newman>) AO, from the Curtin University Sustainability Policy Institute, have been named finalists in the **Scientist of the Year** category.

Professor Bland's research is focused on the origin and evolution of the solar system through analysing meteorites to explore unanswered questions such as how our planet formed and how it acquired the ingredients for life. He established the Desert Fireball Network in WA as an Australian Laureate Fellow and founded the multi-award winning *Fireballs in the Sky* outreach and citizen science program. In 2015, Professor Bland established a partnership between NASA and Australia in planetary, space and exploration science.

Professor Newman AO has completed decades of globally significant research and public advocacy on the science of cities and their sustainability. His research focuses on transport practices and systems, and how urban redevelopment can be planned with sustainability in mind to enable residents to integrate with their bioregional and human environment. He was awarded Officer of the Order of Australia for his work on urban design and transport sustainability in 2014, particularly related to Perth's rail system.

The other Curtin finalists announced in the Premier's Science Awards 2018, which come from a range of discipline backgrounds, include:

Woodside Early Career Scientist of the Year

Dr Wensu Chen (<https://staffportal.curtin.edu.au/staff/profile/view/Wensu.Chen>) is an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Research Awards Fellow and Senior Research Fellow in the School of Civil and Mechanical Engineering and Centre for Infrastructural Monitoring and Protection at Curtin. Dr Chen's research has led to innovations in structural protection against both natural and man-made hazards. Dr Chen's work is important in preventing the failure of infrastructure, and contributes to the development of increasingly safe, resilient, cost-effective and sustainable infrastructure in Australia.

Dr Adam Cross (<https://staffportal.curtin.edu.au/staff/profile/view/Adam.Cross>) is a Research Fellow from Curtin University's School of Molecular and Life Sciences. His research focuses on restoring degraded mining areas into biodiverse ecosystems and turning hostile mine waste into healthy soils. His cost-effective methods are beneficial to industry and assist companies to exceed regulatory requirements and restoration goals. Dr Cross has applied his restoration skills by volunteering with community restoration group Cambridge Coastcare for more than a decade.

Dr Katarina Miljkovic (<https://staffportal.curtin.edu.au/staff/profile/view/Katarina.Miljkovic>) is an Early Career Research Fellow at Curtin University's School of Earth and Planetary Sciences. Initially an astrophysicist, her expertise now includes planetary geoscience, especially focused on the processes. Dr Miljkovic analyses data from space missions and she plays an active role in international planetary exploration teams. For example, until recently she participated in the lunar gravity NASA mission GRAIL. Currently, she is on the Martian geophysical NASA mission InSight, now on its way to Mars.

ExxonMobil Student Scientist of the Year

Ryan Urquhart (<https://staffportal.curtin.edu.au/staff/profile/view/Ryan.Urquhart>) is a PhD student from Curtin University's School of Electrical Engineering, Computing and Mathematical Sciences. Mr Urquhart's research into the Universe's fastest feeding black holes has achieved important new insights into how they extract energy from in-falling matter and inject it into their surroundings. Mr Urquhart is actively involved with scientific outreach within Western Australia through regular engagement with primary and high school students, and mentoring undergraduate students.

Curtin University Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, Professor Chris Moran, congratulated the finalists in the Premier's Science Awards 2018, adding that their recognition highlighted the important research being carried out at the University.

"The calibre of research being acknowledged with these finalists is testament to the growing impact of Curtin's research on the local, national and international stage," Professor Moran said.

"The achievements of these finalists reflect the University's strong research record, leadership and innovation in many areas of science, including planetary sciences, sustainability, engineering, and biodiversity.

"I congratulate all six of Curtin's finalists on their selection for these prestigious awards, which exemplify the outstanding scientific research and engagement taking place in Western Australia."

The Premier's Science Awards recognise and celebrate the achievements of the Western Australian science community by acknowledging the State's best and brightest across four award categories.

The Premier's Science Awards 2018 winners will be announced on 15 August 2018, during National Science Week. More information about the awards can be found [here](http://www.jtsi.wa.gov.au/what-we-do/science-and-innovation/science-award-programs/premier's-science-awards) (<http://www.jtsi.wa.gov.au/what-we-do/science-and-innovation/science-award-programs/premier's-science-awards>) .

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