



ALLAN WILSON CENTRE MEDIA RELEASE

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NZ ANCESTRY STUDY TO SAMPLE THE DNA OF EX-PATS IN LONDON

Professor Lisa Matisoo-Smith (University of Otago and Allan Wilson Centre) is going to London in June to collect 200 DNA samples from ex-pat New Zealanders. These will complete her 2000 sample ancient ancestry study of New Zealanders, which will map the diverse origins of our people and their different journeys to Aotearoa/New Zealand. Her research project, entitled *The Longest Journey – from Africa to Aotearoa*, is funded by a James Cook Fellowship and the National Geographic Genographic Project, and supported by the Allan Wilson Centre.

The Allan Wilson Centre will invite New Zealanders in London to come to the NZ High Commission on 16 and 17 June to hear the story DNA analysis has revealed, and to write a new chapter in human history by contributing their own DNA. The collection of samples from London acknowledges the number of New Zealanders who travel and live abroad, but still call New Zealand home. Many are drawn to the UK where their ancestors originated. The majority of New Zealanders, including many Maori, have at least one ancestral lineage from the UK and strongly identify with British culture and history. We share the experiences of two World Wars and this year united in greater numbers than ever before to reflect on the sacrifice of life at Gallipoli.

The scientific expedition will be co-led by Sir David Skegg, President of the Royal Society of NZ, former Governor General Sir Anand Satyanand, and Mr Rau Kirikiri, Governance Board member of the Allan Wilson Centre, which is organising the events. They will also present at the London events on the origins and characteristic diversity of the New Zealand population, its changing demographics, and what binds us as New Zealanders.

In association with the mission, Kim Hill of Radio NZ National will broadcast two of her Saturday morning programmes from the BBC studios in London (20 and 27 June), and Distinguished Professor Anne Noble and Masters Photography student, Tom Hoyle, will record the events for Lisa's wider project. This will help Lisa share her study results and the personal stories behind them with all New Zealanders.

The New Zealand cultural landscape is shifting, as a recent demographic study by the Royal Society of NZ – Te Pae Tawhiti - reveals. In recent times, we have welcomed many more immigrants from Asian, African and East European countries, and the percentage of Maori and Pasifika people in the population is projected to increase markedly. Twenty five percent of our people were born outside the country. Lisa's interim results already show that New Zealanders represent every maternal lineage that diverged from the original group of modern humans that left Africa.

It was established by New Zealand evolutionary biologist Allan Wilson that all humans alive today descend from a common maternal ancestor who lived in Africa about 150-200,000 years ago. Since humans left Africa about 60,000 years ago, we have dispersed across the globe, finally arriving in Aotearoa just 750 years ago.

The voyage on this final lap of the journey was long and dangerous, whether by waka from the Pacific Islands, or by sailing ship from the United Kingdom. And many of our recent immigrants endured great hardship from wars, civil strife and poverty, prior to making new lives and commitments in New Zealand.

Says Lisa, "We all started out in Africa and we all eventually ended up in Aotearoa. We carry the history of those many journeys in our DNA as well as in our social and cultural histories. What amazing journeys they are. This project, *The Longest Journey, From Africa to Aotearoa*, is a way to celebrate the history and diversity of all New Zealanders and also to acknowledge our recent common ancestry."

Professor Lisa Matisoo-Smith is a Principal Investigator of the Allan Wilson Centre which is organising and supporting this collaborative mission, together with:

Royal Society of New Zealand

Kiwi Expats Abroad (KEA, including World Class New Zealanders)

Massey University

Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History

National Geographic Genographic Project

NZ High Commission in London

Radio New Zealand National

University of Otago

For more information: contact Wendy Newport-Smith, Manager of the Allan Wilson Centre, w.newport-smith@massey.ac.nz, 021 423 757, or Glenda Lewis, glendajanelewis@gmail.com, 027 210 0997.

www.allanwilsoncentre.ac.nz

www.genographic.com