



FOUNDATION RECEIVES HISTORIC GIFT

A Trust established by Taranaki philanthropist Dr George Mason is gifting \$5 million to the Massey University Foundation to advance natural environmental research at Massey University.

The gift is the largest ever received by the Foundation and will establish the Dr George Mason Endowment Fund for Natural Environmental Research.

The endowment is expected to generate \$250,000–\$350,000 in income each year, which will be used by Massey Foundation to support research and scholarships that meet Dr Mason's long-term vision for environmental stewardship.

Dr Mason was an accomplished research scientist, environmentalist and passionate advocate for the Taranaki region. In 1995, he established the George Mason Charitable Trust to promote science in schools and universities, and to support environmental initiatives, with a focus on the Taranaki region.

He began giving scholarships to Massey in 2002 and has contributed more than \$600,000 in the past 24 years. Between 2012 and 2025 the George Mason Sustainable Land Use Scholarship was awarded to 50 College of Science students. In 2016, the Trust began funding comprehensive fulltime scholarships, including stipends, for students completing PhD research on wildlife.

For scholarship recipient Dr Emma Scheltema, the funding from the George Mason Trust made it possible for her to leave her full-time job and embark on a three-and-a-half-year PhD project focused on improving the diagnosis and exploring potential new drug treatments for coccidiosis in kiwi chicks in captivity.

"Knowing that someone believes your research project is important and worth funding gives you extra confidence. I just wanted to do a really good job and get results," Dr Scheltema says.

Her research uncovered a new species of coccidia that infects tissue outside the intestine; established the blood biochemistry and haematology of kiwi chicks; identified a new method of administering anticoccidial drug treatments via food; and developed a method of testing drug levels in kiwis via their faeces.

"This was a really rare opportunity to do this kind of applied wildlife health research, and I hope the findings will be able to be used by conservationists working with kiwi."

George Mason Trust Chair Barry Upson says before George died in 2024 he was very clear about his intention to give his entire estate to the Charitable Trust he established in 1995 providing scholarship funding to universities he was connected to.

"In the 1950s his own PhD at the University of California was entirely sponsored by his Taranaki employer Dan Watkins and I believe that gave him the inspiration to sponsor PhD students and enable scientific research."

Massey University Foundation Director Mitch Murdoch first met George Mason 15 years ago and describes him as both a scholar and a gentleman.

"He was a humble man, and a generous man, with an infinite curiosity for just about everything! George has done so much for so many people, and here at Massey we were privileged to have benefited from his philanthropy." Ms Murdoch says.

"The incredible gift we have received from his Trust today will continue his legacy, and I hope that, in the great cycle of life, one of his PhD students will go on to become the next George Mason – an intelligent philanthropist with a passion for solving problems and helping people."

FOUNDATION UPDATE

In early February the university bid farewell to Vice-Chancellor Prof Jan Thomas, and welcomed new Vice-Chancellor Dr Pierre Venter. Dr Venter automatically joins the board of the Massey University Foundation, and he was warmly welcomed by fellow Trustees at the Foundation's February meeting.

Fundraising in the first quarter of the year was dominated by the receipt of a remarkable gift of \$5 million from the George Mason Charitable Trust (see story opposite). It is our largest single donation ever. The gift will be endowed, and income from it will support multi-disciplinary research for the natural environment. After working with George and his trustees for many years, I was delighted to accept this gift into the Foundation's care to continue George's legacy.

The gift moves the Foundation a step closer to achieving the For a Better World Campaign goal of having \$100 million in assets by the end of 2027. By the end of February, the Foundation's assets sat just over \$90 million, putting us comfortably on target for 2027.

It is always good to see students on campus, and this year Massey campuses sprang to life in late February as orientation week began.

Seeing the students reminds me of why we all support the Foundation. The wonderful young people I see on campus will be tomorrow's leaders, researchers and teachers and it feels important to support them on their journeys.

The Foundation's annual alumni appeal is about to close and I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those alumni that have supported this year's appeal. We always enjoy hearing from our alumni during the appeal and look forward to seeing many of you at our Xmas functions for donors later in the year.

Finally, the Foundation welcomed new staff members onto the Auckland and Palmerston North campuses. Graeme Mullin joins the Foundation working from the Albany campus, while Clint Dunstan joins the team in Palmerston North. Sadly, Foundation staff member Amelia Jenkinson has decided not to return from maternity leave. We wish her, Daniel and beautiful baby Arabella the very best.

Mitch Murdoch
Director, Massey University Foundation



Dr Emma Scheltema during her PhD research project

\$1.2M BEQUEST CREATES NEW VETERINARY SCHOLARSHIP

In late 2025, the Massey University Foundation received a \$1.2 million bequest from the estate of Rex Ainsworth McClenaghan.

This gift has enabled the creation of a new scholarship to honour Rex and his mother, Mona, and their lifelong love for animals of every shape and size.

The Mona and Rex McClenaghan Veterinary Scholarship will support postgraduate students at Massey's School of Veterinary Science who are dedicated to improving the health and welfare of dogs, and to understanding the wider impact of pet ownership on people and communities. Valued at \$50,000 each year, the scholarship will fund up to 1.5 years of Master's study or up to three years of doctoral research.

Mona spent most of her life in Grey Lynn, Auckland, on a property that was always home to a variety of animals. Over the years she cared for goldfish, sheep, chickens and many family pets.

Rex's life, meanwhile, had a touch of show business flair. He worked across Sydney, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Hawaii, and at one point even owned a tiger. He was also a regular horseback rider, a trained ballet dancer and someone who lived a life full of travel and adventure. Despite the different worlds he inhabited, Rex never lost the affection for animals that began in his mother's backyard.

Winnie O'Grady, one of the executors of Rex's estate, says he was deeply devoted to his mother and carried her love for animals wherever he went.

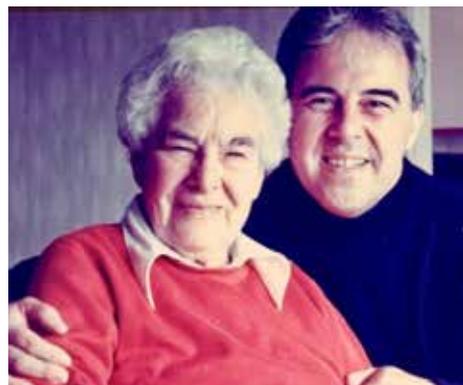
"Rex wanted his Will to reflect what mattered most to him and to Mona. We talked through several ideas, but it became clear that this scholarship truly captured their shared love of animals, their belief in opportunity, and their desire to leave something good behind."

Jon Huxley, Professor and Head of School of Veterinary Science at Massey University, says the gift reflects a remarkable commitment to future generations of veterinarians.

"The Mona and Rex McClenaghan Veterinary Scholarship is a wonderful example of how a benefactor's foresight and generosity can create lasting impact. The scholarship will enable talented postgraduate students to pursue research and advanced training that directly improves the health and welfare of dogs, while also deepening our understanding of the vital role companion animals play in people's lives."



Rex and his dog, Sailor



Mona and Rex McClenaghan

NEW CHAIR STRENGTHENS HORTICULTURE RESEARCH



MSA Chair, Professor Andrew East

A \$1.6 million donation from Massey alumnus and longtime supporter Matthew Abel, has enabled the establishment of the inaugural MSA Chair in Horticultural Production and Postharvest Management at Massey University — a major investment in the future of New Zealand's horticultural sector. The gift, committed over five years, will strengthen research capability, grow postgraduate training, and build key industry partnerships at a time when New Zealand's horticulture sector has approximately tripled in value over the past 15 years.

While Mr Abel has previously gifted two Chairs to the Massey Business School through the Foundation, this is his first

gift towards primary sector education and research.

"I would describe my motivation as 50 per cent about helping the New Zealand economy and 50 per cent supporting Massey University. I have seen firsthand how these roles encourage PhD and master's students to pursue research, which supports their academic and professional development.

"I'm hopeful my support reduces the 'push factors' which might lead researchers to leave New Zealand, that it gives them reasons to stay. And I'm also optimistic that with more employment options in horticultural industry management and research, more young people will consider choosing the sector as a career."

The Chair recognises the leadership of Professor Andrew East, an internationally regarded specialist in postharvest horticulture. Known for his long standing work with the kiwifruit industry through Zespri, he provides technical expertise when new cultivars are commercialised — a critical part of maintaining fruit quality and brand reputation. The new Chair will allow Professor East to intensify his kiwifruit research and broaden work across avocados, blueberries, vegetables and feijoas, with plans to support up to 10 PhD candidates and six master's students over the next decade.

The Chair's budget includes funding for travel, conferences, and collaboration with key industry and academic partners — elements that ensure Massey's research remains globally connected and industry-relevant.

"This Chair is about more than research," Professor East says. "It's about building more networks and capability in the horticultural sector. Not unlike other industries, horticulture faces challenges with aging expertise and squeezed research funding budgets. We need to collectively work together to continue to deliver impactful research, while also developing talent in order to underpin a resilient, innovative horticulture sector."

Mitch Murdoch, Director of the Massey University Foundation, says Mr Abel's generosity will make a significant difference to Horticulture in New Zealand and to the team here at Massey.

"I really can't thank Matthew enough, this gift will elevate Andrew and his team internationally and in New Zealand. It will ensure Massey stays at the forefront of horticultural teaching and research, and crucially, it will boost this country's export production."

COLGAN FOUNDATION GIFTS TO MARINE MAMMAL RESEARCH

A donation of more than US\$190,000 from the US based Colgan Foundation will support critical marine mammal research at Massey University.

The gift will strengthen the Cetacean Ecology Research Group (CERG), which leads conservation research on dolphins, whales and porpoises.

Founded in 1995 by US Olympic rower Sean Colgan, the Colgan Foundation supports athletic, scientific and educational causes worldwide. In 2025, it gifted the first tranche of a US\$192,825 three year commitment to support research and operational costs at CERG's Cetacean Pathology Unit. The gift includes a PhD scholarship worth US\$25,710 annually.

Professor Karen Stockin, Cetacean Pathology Unit Lead, says the scholarship has enabled essential research after a two year struggle to secure funding. "We have had an excellent candidate waiting in the wings, and the funding from the Colgan Foundation has been an absolute game changer for this important study."

Research by the team shows a gradual decline in the body condition of common dolphins over the past 30 years. "We're seeing smaller animals or lower body weights in unison with increasing evidence of disease," Karen says.

Colgan Foundation doctoral scholar Nicholai Xuereb will analyse 30 years of dolphin

tissue samples to quantify this decline, using hormone and blubber adiposity markers to identify links to sex and age. He will also investigate potential causes, including climate related changes in prey, contaminants and disease.

Although common dolphins are considered opportunistic feeders, evidence shows they target prey with specific nutritional value. "We want to demonstrate what they feed on, and what the ramifications could be if they are forced to change their prey," Karen says. This research could help support

protection measures for prey species.

"Many of their current prey species, such as sprat and pilchards are not covered under the current fisheries management system. However, decline of these so called 'bait fish' affects not only dolphins but other species in the ecosystem."

Director of Operations Eimile Colgan Gustafson says Colgan Foundation's long-standing focus on marine conservation made CERG a natural partner. "It was only natural to add the CERG project to widen our understanding of oceanic ecosystems."



Common dolphins. Photo: Auckland Whale and Dolphin Safaris

T.R. ELLETT TRUST DRIVES SUSTAINABILITY AND PRODUCTIVITY

Three Massey postgraduate students have received \$360,000 from the T.R. Ellett Agricultural Research Trust to advance research aimed at improving New Zealand pasture performance and sustainability. The Trust was founded by Massey alumnus, lecturer and pioneering pasture developer Trevor Ellett.

Nisha Weerasinghe will receive \$120,000 from the trust over three years to support her PhD research on nitrate leaching, greenhouse gas emissions, and assessing the growth performance and resilience of different pasture species in sheep farming systems.

"My goal is to provide scientific insights that help farmers, researchers and policy makers design efficient and environmentally sustainable grazing strategies for New Zealand's sheep farms. The scholarship not only recognises the impact of my research; I moved to New Zealand to study and I'm fortunate I don't need to take on part-time work to manage financially."

Charuka Chandrasekara will receive \$120,000 for doctoral research on photosynthetic capacity and carbohydrate metabolism of the leaves of diverse pasture species; in different growth stages, seasons and times of the day, and how those levels affect foliage production and quality. Her work will help optimise pasture composition and grazing practices for dairy cows, as higher chlorophyll content translates to greater milk protein content, and elevated sugar levels make pasture more palatable. She also plans to develop methods farmers can use to monitor chlorophyll and sugar content.

Pabodi Wijenayake will receive \$120,000 over three years for research into root growth and distribution in standard and diverse pasture systems, and how roots influence soil health and ecosystem resilience.

"My insights could lead to more sustainable pasture management practices that improve soil health and make farms more resilient to climate change."

She says the scholarship will allow her to fully dedicate herself to her studies: "I'm from a middle-class family in Sri Lanka and it would have been very hard to afford the tuition fees and living expenses without this support."

Trevor Ellett graduated from Massey with a Bachelor of Science in 1945, and lectured there until 1951.

He played an instrumental role in the development of ryegrass in New Zealand. Seeds from his "Mangere" ryegrass ecotype were developed and sold by horticultural seed company Arthur Yates & Co Ltd, and the resulting royalties were used to establish what would later become the T.R Ellett Agricultural Research Trust.

Angela Halliday, General Manager from the Trust, says it was established to support research and capability building within the pastoral sector.

"Trevor had a vision of fostering the development of researchers and applied pastoral research in New Zealand, a passion we continue to uphold through all the Trust's work and the students we support today."



Pabodi Wijenayake (student)

SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORTS EARTH SCIENCE STUDENTS

Five Massey University postgraduate students have together received \$95,000 through scholarships established by Dr Eileen Fair - a trailblazing geoscientist and Manawatū businesswoman.



Maia Kidd doing field work in Tongariro National Park

The Dr Eileen Fair Masters and Doctoral Scholarships in Earth Science are worth \$10,000 and \$25,000 respectively, and aim to support scientists to complete their postgraduate studies in earth science. Applications for the final scholarship for a master's student opened in November last year.

A fierce supporter of education and women in science and academia, Eileen completed her Master of Science at Massey University in 1968, with her dissertation dating the river terraces of the Manawatū River. She went on to complete a PhD in Geomorphology at Southern Illinois University and lecture at several universities overseas before returning to New Zealand.

Eileen grew up in Palmerston North and was a passionate advocate of Manawatū, a region she called home for most of her life.

Jonathan Procter, Massey Professor of Natural Hazards and Group Lead for Earth Science, says the scholarships were the most significant on offer for earth science postgraduate students at Massey.

"The scholarships made a notable contribution to good environmental outcomes while at the same time providing support for young students, particularly women, in that discipline.

"Eileen broke the mould; she was one of the first women to come through the discipline and go on to a master's and a PhD.

"We'd like to thank Eileen, and the trustees of Eileen's estate for the significant impact that these scholarships are having on students' careers."

Doctoral scholarship recipient Maia Kidd received \$25,000 towards her research investigating how hydrothermal systems affect the properties of volcanic rock at Ruapehu, Tongariro and Whakaari.

Her findings can be used in hazard modelling and monitoring to help predict the risk of volcanic landslides and phreatic – or hydrothermal – eruptions, such as the eruption on Whakaari in December 2019.

The scholarship provided external validation that her research is important, Maia says.

"I'm really grateful for the generosity of the estate of Dr Eileen Fair for supporting PhD research, which is the backbone of research in this field."

A spokesperson for the estate of Dr Eileen Fair says Eileen was passionate about providing opportunities to students in Manawatū.

"As trustees of her estate, we have been delighted to continue her legacy and honour Dr Eileen Fair's original Deed of Gift for scholarships in earth science.

"In 2025, we saw the impact of this legacy first-hand during a research presentation from scholarship recipients and their supervisors. From the quality and professionalism of the presentations, it is clear to see that the research is making a valuable contribution, both here in Aotearoa New Zealand, and internationally."

ALUMNI APPEAL SNAPSHOT

Thank you to everyone who has supported the Alumni Appeal so far.

Your generosity continues to make a meaningful difference for Massey students.



\$41,334
RAISED
SO FAR



\$196
AVERAGE
GIFT

There is still time to be part of this year's Appeal.

Donations can be made online at foundation.massey.ac.nz/alumni-appeal or by returning your donation form.



WE'VE MOVED



The Massey University Foundation has a new home on the Palmerston North campus.

**You'll now find us in the
Social Sciences Tower on Level 2
(Room 2.25).**

**Same team, same mission — just
a new floor and a new view.**

**Pop in and say hello next time
you're on campus.**



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