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Marine Research at the Coasts of Colombia

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) grants Excellence Center for Research and Education "Coastal Colombian Resources and Environmental Changes"

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) gives the green light: experts from Germany will help to promote the protection and sustainable usage of the rich coastal resources of Colombia. The DAAD funds the establishment of the German-Colombian Excellence Center for Research and Education "Coastal Colombian Resources and Environmental Changes", a project of two biologists from Justus Liebig University Giessen (JLU). The DAAD supports the center of excellence as a major cooperation project with a total of 1.5 million Euros in the framework of the "Foreign Science Initiative 2009" of the Federal Foreign Office. The Center is one of four DAAD Centers of Excellence for Research and Teaching worldwide.

Work to establish the center will begin as early as August 1, 2009. For professors Bernd Werding and Thomas Wilke of the JLU Institute of Animal Ecology and Systematics this means to build up the infrastructure at the Colombian Caribbean coast in Santa Marta, to recruit excellent teaching staff for the PhD-Program, and to award the first eight PhD grants.

Colombia is one of five so-called "mega-diverse countries" in the world with an extraordinarily high diversity of species. Although the country, framed by the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, accounts for less than one percent of the Earth's surface, it ranks at the top in terms of the number of endemic species. This high number of endemic species is both due to a well-documented biodiversity in the county's tropical rain forests and a vast marine territory in two ocean waters.

The promotion of marine sciences and the protection and sustainable use of marine resources are a national priority in Colombia. The loss of marine biodiversity, the increasing destruction of coastal habitats by agriculture, industry and tourism, and the adverse influence of global warming on marine habitats have long been a concern for politicians and scientists.

Against this background, the Center of Excellence aims at coordinating and concentrating the previously isolated initiatives for the protection and sustainable use of the rich coastal resources of Colombia, at influencing the economic and

scientific policies in the region, and at educating future leaders in the field of marine science.

The cooperation between JLU and its Colombian partners has a long tradition. In 1963 Justus Liebig University Giessen founded a marine biology field station in Santa Marta which spawned today's INVEMAR (Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas). Both scientists are especially pleased that their plans can now be implemented efficiently in a major cooperation project with the financial support of the DAAD. "This is the preliminary culmination of nearly 50 years of successful cooperation between Giessen and Colombia," says Prof. Werding, and Prof. Wilke adds that the PhD program of the Centre of Excellence will be linked to the new Bachelor and Master's programs in biology at JLU, "making a biology degree in Giessen even more attractive".

JLU Vice President Joybrato Mukherjee stresses that the success of the biologists from Giessen is evidence of the success of JLU's long-term strategic focus. "We systematically intensify the development cooperation with excellent partners abroad with whom we have been working closely together for a long time – this renewed success shows that Justus Liebig University is on the right path, especially in the life sciences."

The Center of Excellence, initially scheduled for the next five years, will be established in collaboration with the Christian Albrechts University in Kiel and the Leibnitz Center for Tropical Marine Ecology in Bremen as well as the three leading Colombian universities at the INVEMAR in Santa Marta.

More information <http://www.uni-giessen.de/cms/daadexzellenz>
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