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MEDIA RELEASE

CELEBRATING GIRLS AND WOMEN IN SCIENCE

Award-winning Zoologist and Venomologist Dr Jordan Debono wants more girls and women to make their mark in science.

With the United Nations' International Day of Women and Girls in Science tomorrow (11 February), Dr Debono, 28, is hoping her positive experiences as a female scientist in Australia will encourage others to consider STEM careers.

"Less than 30 per cent of women world-wide are scientists," said Dr Debono, who is a longstanding member of Women in Technology (WiT) and a leading ambassador of science at the University of Queensland.

"Back in 2017 I had just won the Women in STEM Competition. I was standing in the lobby and a little girl came up to me and said that she loved my science after hearing the details of my research. She said she wanted to be like me when she grew up, it was absolutely incredible and took my breath away."

Dr Debono shared that it was common for female scientists to suffer from feelings of inadequacy despite their success, otherwise known as 'imposter syndrome'.

"Talking about that imposter syndrome and not feeling like I was an actual scientist, the interaction with the little girl validated my confidence that I am actually making a difference in science," she said.

International Day of Women and Girls in Science recognises and celebrates the significant contribution of women and girls in all areas of scientific endeavour.

WiT's Sciences Committee Chair Dr Melissa Sykes, who is a Research Fellow in Discovery Biology at the Griffith Institute for Drug Discovery at Griffith University, said barriers existed in attracting and retaining women and girls in science, highlighted by the *Women in STEM Decadal Plan*, released in 2019 by the Australian Academy of Science.

"This report shows that the career progression pipeline for women and girls in science is 'leaky'," said Dr Sykes.

"That is why Women in Technology is on a mission to advance, connect and empower women and ensure they have the opportunities, support and recognition they deserve to achieve their full potential.

“Today we have more than 7000 members and are the biggest community of women in science and technology in Australia. Although we have made great headway in the past 20 years, we still have a long way to go.

“Some areas of STEM have low attraction, particularly engineering, computing, physics and astronomy, with less than 25 per cent women in tertiary courses. Retention is also an issue - women leave STEM mainly due to lack of career progression. Barriers to progression include biased assessment of merit, gender discrimination and expectations around caring responsibilities.

“Girls and women, particularly those who identify as minorities, from rural or regional areas and disadvantaged backgrounds, are especially under-represented in STEM. It is extremely important that girls have mentors and role models in science to support attraction and career progression in STEM.

“Access to a support network early on is important by implementing ambassadors in schools and mentors for young students. February 11 is such an important day in raising awareness and recognising the value and contribution of women and girls in science.”

MEDIA NOTE – To interview Dr Debono or Dr Sykes, contact WiT Media Deanna Nott on 0422 504540 or email media@wit.org.au

ABOUT WiT

As one of Australia’s most respected and active technology industry associations, Women in Technology (WiT) is dedicated to supporting, developing, recognising and promoting the achievements of women in the technology industries through advocacy, networking events, breakfasts, professional development, mentoring and our prestigious WiT Awards.

WiT was founded in 1997 by a small group of Queensland women who came together to share their aspirations and find understanding and solutions for the unique challenges they faced as female pioneers in technology. It now has more than 7000 members from all branches of science and technology. To learn more about WiT visit wit.org.au.