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Unique Laboratory Advances Coastal Marine Studies

A state-of-the-art marine science research laboratory was opened today (22 May) at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), providing facilities for advanced research into the marine environment of the region and a wide range of educational programs.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Prof Paul Ching-Wu Chu, President of HKUST, described the Coastal Marine Laboratory as a much-valued asset for HKUST, Hong Kong, and beyond. "The Laboratory is open to HKUST faculty interested in marine research, thereby encouraging inter-disciplinary projects. We will forge close collaboration with other academic institutions in Hong Kong, the Chinese Mainland, and the Pacific Rim, as well the Hong Kong Government and industry," said Prof Chu.

The Laboratory is a unique facility in Hong Kong and the region. The Laboratory's location, by the seafront on campus, ensures a high quality running seawater system that will be used to provide researchers with a good supply of living plants and animals for their research. The campus-located laboratory provides for economical research by offering researchers the opportunity to utilize the university's existing major research infrastructure.

Dr Pei-Yuan Qian, Director of the Laboratory and Associate Professor of Biology at HKUST, said the region's substantial economic growth has significant implications for the utilization of marine resources, preservation of marine habitats, biodiversity, and overall environmental quality in Hong Kong waters and the surrounding South China Sea. "Our understanding of the marine ecology of the South China Sea is woefully inadequate," said Dr Qian. This new Laboratory will enable HKUST to conduct frontier research that helps us understand the present environmental impacts on marine organisms. This new information will assist our environmental, governmental agencies in managing our valuable marine resources.

The Laboratory houses the largest indoor aquarium in Hong Kong's educational institutions, plus a range of specialized laboratories for teaching and research, including an analytical laboratory, a molecular laboratory, an environmental room, a laboratory for radioactive studies, a SCUBA-diving equipment room, and a multifunctional room for lectures and conferences. Designed for communal use, it can accommodate the research needs of both HKUST faculty as well as visitors.

One of the missions of the Laboratory is to contribute to the University's teaching by supporting the undergraduate and graduate programs in marine and environmental sciences at HKUST. For example, the new postgraduate Atmospheric, Marine and Coastal Marine Environmental Program commenced in the 2001/02 academic year.

The Laboratory also aims to support public education, and will maintain a collection of live marine specimens for this purpose.