

10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE PROGRAMME



From left to right: Dr Andrew Kaniki, Janneke Aylward, Minister Naledi Pandor, Juanita Avontuur, Heidi Fysh, Dr Thandi Mgwebi, Prof Mike Wingfield and Prof Emma Steenkamp

The Department of Science and Technology/National Research Foundation Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB) at FABI was one of the first six CoE's selected for funding by the South African government in 2014. A gala dinner and directors' of the CoE's programme were held in November at the University of the Western Cape to mark the 10th anniversary of the launch of the CoE's programme and the initiation of a programme. The programme has had a substantial impact on the Science System in South Africa and was also mentioned in the November 2014 issue of *Nature* as part of the launch of the Nature Index. Honourable Minister of Science and Technology Naledi Pandor opened the CoE's Director's Forum and praised the accomplishments of the first CoEs. She also welcomed the five most recent CoEs awarded in November, bringing the number of centres to 15. CTHB participation in the CoE Directors' Forum included Profs Mike Wingfield and Emma Steenkamp as director and deputy director respectively, programme manager Heidi

Fysh, board member Mike Edwards, CTHB University of Stellenbosch student Janneke Aylward and FABI student Juanita Avontuur.

The event included two major panel discussions on Engaged Scholarship including a lecture by vice-chancellor of the University of the Western Cape Prof Brain O’Connell and another on Strategies for Strengthening International Collaborations and Partnerships catalyzed with a lecture by CTHB director Prof Mike Wingfield. The CTHB based at FABI focuses its research on the health of native South African trees, engaging students from different disciplines and capitalising on opportunities linked to the intersections between these disciplines. The impact of the CTHB has been exceptional in terms of the many Key Performance Indicators that underpin the CoE’s programme. Close engagement with the Forestry Industry of South Africa has brought substantial leverage of funding for both the industry and the CoE. This links closely to the fact that pest and disease problems reflect many porous boundaries between planted forests and natural woody ecosystems. As is true for all the initial CoE’s, the CTHB has substantially uplifted postgraduate student education with its focus on students from disadvantaged backgrounds, community engagement projects, support for various government initiatives and broad scientific output.

