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LCT, Dr Doug Wilson honored at NZBIO

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Singapore: Living Cell Technologies (LCT), which is based out of Australia and New Zealand, has been named as New Zealand's top bioscience company. Dr Doug Wilson, a biotechnologist, has been honored as the Janssen Distinguished Biotechnologist at the 2013 NZBIO Conference Awards.

Dr George Slim, CEO of NZBIO, says the judges rewarded LCT for taking a complex, world-first treatment technology over some very tough regulatory hurdles to show considerable promise in human trials.

"The company has a strong portfolio of follow on products and has recently entered into a partnership deal with a major international pharmaceutical company," the judges said.

Dr Slim said it had been tough selecting the top bioscience company, because among the finalists there was a range of excellent businesses, all of which had different business models.

The top biotechnologist, Dr Doug Wilson, is a graduate from the University of Auckland medical school. He did post graduate research in London before starting an academic career in Auckland. In 1987 he changed tack and became NZ medical director of Boehringer Ingelheim in New Zealand.

Dr Wilson rose to become the head of Boehringer Ingelheim Clinical Research Institute, overseeing all clinical research worldwide for the company. He then became head of medicine and regulatory affairs worldwide, based in Germany, overseeing all the research programmes for the company and all interactions with the European Medicines Evaluation Agency (EMEA).

NZBIO also saluted emerging talent in the bioscience sector. The emerging company of the year must be less than five-years-old and have a product pipeline and a development strategy, among other criteria. The young biotechnologist of the year is awarded to someone under 40-years-old whose work demonstrates the potential for future leadership in New Zealand's bioeconomy.

The emerging company of the year was awarded to Biotelliga. The judges commented that Biotelliga shows strong links between its science, the industry sector and consumers' needs in an important area of the New Zealand economy.

Biotelliga, which is based at Pukekohe near Auckland, develops and produces biological, sustainable, non-chemical based crop spray solutions for the effective management and control of pests and diseases in agriculture and horticulture.

The young biotechnologist for 2013 was awarded to Hywel Griffiths from Photonz, an Auckland-based company that produces the omega-3 fatty acid eicosapentaenoic acid from its primary source, marine microalgae. EPA is a critical ingredient in regulated pharmaceutical products and medicinal foods addressing cardiovascular disease.

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The judges commented that Dr Griffiths has gone from an outstanding record of doctoral and postdoctoral research in Europe to making a significant contribution to scale up and development of bioprocesses for a leading New Zealand company.

"Dr Griffiths is an acknowledged world leader in a complex area of science and has recruited and led an excellent team of scientists as the company grows rapidly," the judges said.

Dr Slim says while there is plenty of young talent about and the emerging companies who were finalists were good companies, NZBIO is concerned that the pipeline of emerging bioscience companies is less than what it has been in the past 10 years.

"New Zealand's innovation is celebrated internationally and its entrepreneurs have attracted foreign investment," said Dr Slim. "With the limited pool of capital beyond the first couple of stages of development in New Zealand, it is vital for our companies to retain NZ support if they are to realise the potential of their technologies internationally."