

# \$1m fires up deafness project

THE development of a potential first treatment for the most common type of deafness, which sends tiny drug-loaded particles into the inner ear, has been boosted by a \$1 million grant from the US military.

Melbourne's Bionics Institute answered an international call-out by America's Department of Defence, desperate for a treatment to repair hearing loss caused by noise exposure.

Sensorineural hearing loss

**BRIGID O'CONNELL**

is permanent and irreversible, and is the most common injury affecting military personnel alongside tinnitus.

But hearing loss from noise exposure is common across many industries.

The team, led by Associate Professor Andrew Wise, has developed porous particles — smaller than hundreds and thousands sprinkles — that are

loaded with medication and delivered through the ear drum into the cochlear to protect the easily-damaged sensory hair cells that convert sound into nerve impulses.

The aim of the work now, with colleagues at the University of Melbourne, is to determine if the technique can reconnect the lost cellular connections between the ear and the brain, just like reconnecting the lead to a microphone.



Idris Elba

# SEXIEST MAN OF THE YEAR

HE has long been touted as a contender to be the next James Bond. And Idris Elba has certainly shown he has 007's good looks after being named as 2018's Sexiest Man Alive.

The actor, 46, says the accolade from *People* magazine in the US has given him an "ego boost".

"I was like, 'Come on, no way. Really?'," he told the magazine.

"Looked in the mirror, I

checked myself out. I was like, 'Yeah, you are kind of sexy today.'"

He added: "My mum is going to be very, very proud."

Previous men to have won the award include former footballer David Beckham, actor and former wrestler Dwayne Johnson and singer Adam Levine.

Elba, star of *Luther*, *The Wire* and *Mandela: Long Walk To Freedom*, tweeted he was "honoured".



Nima and Dawa Pelden with their letters from kidsnews.com.au  
Picture: ALEX COPPEL

# CFA, MFB report held back

**TOM MINEAR AND JAMES DOWLING**

A REPORT that uncovered bullying and sexism in Victoria's fire services will remain secret after the human rights commission decided not to continue court action to have it released publicly.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission confirmed yesterday it would not seek leave to appeal the suppression of its report.

The state government called on VEOHRC in 2016 to probe allegations of sexism, bullying and harassment. But the militant United Firefighters Union launched a Supreme Court and later Court of Appeal challenge to have the report suppressed.

The Court of Appeal last month ruled on a "technical point" that only the MFB or CFA could have requested VEOHRC's investigation, not the government.

Commissioner Kristen Hilton said VEOHRC decided not to launch an appeal on legal advice.

"We will seek to work with the Victorian Government to clarify the commission's ability to conduct systemic inquiries and investigations of this nature," she said. "I am aware that sexism, discrimination and inequity continue to cause harm in fire and emergency services across the country."

"We encourage the MFB and CFA, as well as other fire and emergency organisations across the sector, to continue to work to address this."

A person who contributed to the report told the *Herald Sun* it was "just devastating".

# 'Right beside you'

**GRANT MCARTHUR**

CONJOINED twins Nima and Dawa Pelden will undergo separation surgery tomorrow, backed by an outpouring of support from Australian children.

Up to 30 Royal Children's Hospital specialists will be involved in the highly complex procedure to give the 15-month-old Bhutanese sisters individual lives while retaining their full health.

Having waited more than a year for help, their mother Bhumchu Zangmo said she was relieved when told surgery was just days away, but she was anxious at the thought of what lay ahead.

She was overjoyed by a surprise delivery of more than 350

## Support for twins as big day dawns

heartfelt messages of hope and support from children across Australia who had followed their story on kidsnews.com.au.

"I am so happy that so many people have good feelings and prayers for my twins' surgery," Ms Zangmo said, speaking through a translator.

"I will take all these letters to Bhutan and when the girls grow up and are able to read, I will ask them to read them all."

Schoolchildren from every state urged the twins to be strong and brave and told them how courageous and beautiful they were, including Alana, 9, from Deer Park who wrote: "I have been through eight surgeries before. It was

scary for me because I didn't know what life would be like. But don't worry, I'm right beside you," Alana wrote.

Finn, 12, said he knew the girls were strong and would come out on top.

"You are an inspiration to us and we should follow you with great pride and joy," he wrote.

The separation surgery was originally planned to take place on October 12, but had to be postponed to allow the girls to build their strength and overcome ill health after the long journey from their Himalayan home.

RCH head of paediatric surgery Joe Cramer yesterday

announced a team of 18 surgeons and other specialists would work in unison in the operating theatre tomorrow, while others would be involved in the unique effort required to care for the sisters after the operation.

Dr Cramer said the plans for the surgery remained unchanged from the initial proposal, based on scans undertaken in Bhutan and in Nima and Dawa's first days in Australia.

"There are some unknowns that we have to be prepared for, but we feel reasonably confident that we can address those at the time," he said.

"We haven't done any

further testing with regard to surgery, we feel confident we have all the information we need."

Ms Zangmo told the *Herald Sun* she had mixed emotions approaching tomorrow's surgery but, after waiting more than a year for help, she was desperate for Nima and Dawa to be given a shot at separation.

"At times I am very happy it is now going ahead but, at the same time, I am a bit worried about whether everything will go as planned," she said.

"Looking back, I think it was a wise decision by the doctors to delay the surgery. They have put on weight and got used to the environment here," she said.

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## 'ONE OF THE GREATEST'

SIR Elton John says he stood by the stage and sobbed as Aretha Franklin gave her final public performance at his AIDS foundation gala last year.

On the red carpet this time around, Sir Elton called her show "one of the greatest performances of our lifetime". Franklin died in August at age 76.

This year's gala, held yesterday, raised \$3.9 million for the Elton John AIDS Foundation, a leader in the fight against AIDS.