

FOCTA Report to the NZMSS Council  
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**19<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals**  
**Society for Marine Mammalogy**  
**Tampa, Florida, USA**  
**November 27 – December 2, 2011**

In November 2011 I attended my first overseas conference, the 19<sup>th</sup> Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals in Tampa, Florida. Bringing together students and marine mammal experts from around the world, this conference provided an opportunity to discuss the latest research and encouraged international collaboration. I was able to take advantage of this invaluable experience thanks to the NZMSS travel award and I am very grateful to the Society for their support.

The theme of the conference was the cumulative effects of threats to marine mammals and the challenges to animals, scientists and managers. A huge amount of research was presented with a total of 351 oral and 664 poster presentations. During the weekend before the conference, several workshops were organised of which I was able to attend two. These workshops included oral presentations from leading experts and allowed for group discussion on some of the latest methods for studying marine mammals. Throughout the week, research was presented from a wide variety of fields, including ecology, conservation, population genetics, anatomy, acoustics and fisheries interactions. It was interesting and inspiring to attend both talks directly related to my own research and those from other fields. Of particular interest to me were presentations on dietary studies, habitat modelling and ecology. I valued the chance to talk with these researchers about their experiences and discuss the similar challenges we have faced.

As I am now approaching the final year of my PhD at Otago University I was able to present a poster of my work on Hector's dolphin habitat selection while it is still in progress, and discuss my future analysis and write-up with other researchers. Throughout the week I met with others working both in New Zealand and overseas, and appreciated the opportunity to reconnect as well as form new collaborations.

Overall this was a very valuable experience during my PhD and I encourage other students to attend overseas conferences. I appreciate the support the NZMSS gives to emerging scientists and would like to thank the Society for making this experience possible.