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Dear Helen,

First Overseas Conference Travel Fund Report

I would like to extend my appreciation to NZMSS for the generous contribution toward the cost of my travel to the 19th Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals, which was held in Tampa, Florida, USA from 26 November - 2 December 2011. The Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals is the world's largest international marine mammal conference, and so was an important platform for presenting my preliminary PhD research on the life history of New Zealand pilot whales. Attendance at this conference provided valuable networking, collaboration, and mentoring opportunities with many well respected, international, marine mammal scientists.

The 19th Biennial Conference brought together close to 2,000 marine mammal scientists and students from around the world. The programme included 351 oral presentations, held in four concurrent sessions over five full days, many of which were directly relevant to my research. 664 posters were on display for the duration of the conference, including my poster presentation, 'Two recent mass strandings of long-finned pilot whales on the New Zealand coast' (pdf attached). The posters had great exposure at the conference, with 2.5 hours dedicated to poster viewing each day, including a 1.5 hour sundowner poster session on Monday-Thursday evenings.

In addition to the formal programme, there were various other events before and during the conference. Twenty-nine workshops were held over the weekend prior to the conference, and I was lucky enough to be able to attend two of them, 'Cetacean Mass Stranding Response', and 'Age Estimation in Monodontids'. The mass stranding workshop was hosted by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) Marine Mammal Rescue and Research staff based at Cape Cod, Massachusetts, USA, where the frequency of mass stranding events is comparable to New Zealand, but response protocols differ considerably. This workshop presented the opportunity to establish relationships with other mass stranding responders around the world, and facilitated data sharing and support. A portion of the morning was dedicated to selected speakers presenting on their agencies and/or groups response protocols, outcomes, and mass stranding-

related research. In the afternoon, a discussion format allowed greater networking and information sharing between attendees. Specific topic areas included health assessment/ disposition decision-making, specialized equipment, post-release monitoring, and maximizing the science of stranding response. Several attendees expressed an interest in stranding-related research sabbaticals based in New Zealand, and New Zealand was invited to co-host a follow-up stranding response workshop at the next Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals, to be held in New Zealand in 2013.

The age estimation workshop was hosted by the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO), and the proceedings are currently in preparation for publication as an age estimation volume in the NAMMCO scientific series. Although this workshop had more of a focus on monodontids (i.e. beluga and narwhals), methodologies for age determination of other toothed whales were also discussed, and I was recommended a particular methodology for my pilot whale tooth ageing. Several participants also offered to cross-read a few of my tooth sections, for validation purposes.

The official conference kicked off with an ice-breaker reception at the Florida Aquarium on Sunday evening. The rare Weeki Wachee mermaids (endemic to Weeki Wachee Springs, Florida), made a guest appearance and we enjoyed live music performed by the 'Dead Ichs' (a band of local marine scientists). Video night on Monday was popular, and provided an opportunity to join colleagues for an evening viewing natural history and research footage from marine mammal research efforts around the world. The short video clip that I presented highlighted the frequency of pilot whale mass strandings on the New Zealand coast, and then followed the story of one mass stranding event that occurred on Stewart Island in February 2010. This was the only video presentation from New Zealand, and was well received. The social programme also included a student fundraising event 'Manatee Mayhem' on Thursday evening, and a closing banquet on the Friday evening which was followed by dancing late into the night – a memorable end to a memorable conference!

Thanks once again to NZMSS for the support that enabled me to attend my first Society for Marine Mammalogy Conference. It was an immensely rewarding experience and I am now looking forward to hosting the 20th biennial here in New Zealand in 2013.

Sincerely,



Emma Beatson