European Marine Biology Symposium (EMBS), 23rd – 27th August 2010 at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, Scotland

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I appreciate the financial aid given to me by the New Zealand Marine Sciences Society to attend the 45th EMBS in Edinburgh. The conference attracted 220 delegates from 28 countries, mostly European but also from the USA, Chile, Australia and New Zealand. There were approximately 80 oral presentations and 80 posters covering themes such as: general marine biology and diversity, ocean acidification and climate change, marine conservation, invasive marine species, impacts of disease on marine ecology, marine renewables and biotechnology. The conference was jointly held with the Estuarine and Coastal Sciences Association and consequently many of the presentations were based on estuarine systems or species. It was interesting to compare the often highly impacted estuarine systems studied in Europe with the much less impacted estuaries I have been studying in New Zealand. I presented a talk titled "The effects of cockle beds on nutrient cycling and primary productivity", which was an updated version of the presentation I gave at the NZMSS 2010 conference in July, in the general marine biology and diversity session.

There were several talks, including a keynote lecture, on the impact of parasites on bivalves, particularly in relation to summer mortality events, which was of relevance to my PhD. Mass mortality of cockles in Whangateau estuary in 2009 was attributed to a combination heat stress and parasitic infection. As I intend to model the effect of declining cockle populations on that estuary as part of my PhD research then it was interesting to learn more about some of the mechanisms involved in such an event. A session on seamounts covered benthic assemblage mapping, the low resilience of seamount benthic communities to trawling and the effects of seamount protection. Although outside of my PhD area it was very interesting and as there are hundreds of seamounts in New Zealand waters, with many used as fishing grounds, it was obviously relevant to marine biologists in this country.

A few talks made use of long-term (up to 50 years) monitoring data to reveal the processes that govern the population fluctuations of certain species, or to identify impacts of climate change on ecosystems. These presentations reinforced the idea that long-term studies are extremely valuable and should be a priority for marine science in New Zealand.

I thoroughly enjoyed this conference and it was valuable for me to hear about research relevant to my PhD, but also about areas of marine biology that I would otherwise be less likely to find out about.