

NZMSS First Overseas Conference Travel Fund Report

Estuarine and Coastal Sciences Association conference (ECSA 55)

Unbound boundaries and shifting baselines: Estuaries and coastal seas in a changing world

London, UK, September 6-9, 2015

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I would like to extend my gratitude to the New Zealand Marine Sciences Society for the support to attend the Estuarine and Coastal Sciences Association 55th conference in London (September 2015). This was my first overseas conference and the opportunity to attend and present my research was an invaluable part of my PhD and career development. The conference hosted delegates from all over the world, working in estuarine research and management. Plenary talks were from many noteworthy scientists, providing interesting perspectives on the numerous challenges coastal scientists face. These and many other talks were both motivating and thought-provoking; especially regarding the need for ecosystem resilience research, where my work fits in.

I was lucky to have my abstract “Biodiversity-ecosystem function relationships drive coastal denitrification – evidence from a real world ecosystem” accepted as an oral presentation. This was an extremely valuable opportunity to showcase my research to an audience of over 100 people. Alongside other researchers working on nitrogen in coastal ecosystems, I presented in the session “Interactions between biological, geochemical and physical processes: Fluxes and functions”. I thoroughly enjoyed being involved in this session, and engaging in discussions with the other presenters. I was proud and delighted to be nominated for the Best Student Oral Presentation Award.

I also attended the European Marine Biology Symposium, in Helgoland, Germany (September 2015). I made an oral presentation “Macrobenthic community composition drives denitrifier response to nutrient loading” in the session “Biodiversity as a response to or a driver of change”. This and other sessions included many talks on marine soft sediment ecosystem function, particularly in response to stressors, which was highly relevant to my research. This was a much smaller meeting that provided a great environment for networking and getting to know people.

The final part of my trip was a 3 week research stay at the Tvärminne Zoological Station, University of Helsinki. Tvärminne is in a remote location, 2 hours from Helsinki, on the southern coast of Finland. During my stay I was involved in field work and laboratory work, helping PhD students working on benthic nutrient cycling and ecosystem functioning in subtidal sediments from shallow coastal sites in the Baltic Sea. I also took part in a Benthic Ecology workshop, which involved presentations and discussions with participants from Finland, France, Canada, England, Spain, Sweden, and New Zealand. This collaboration and opportunity to work in a different setting, with another research group was highly rewarding.

Experiencing first-hand the research that is happening globally in estuarine and coastal ecology was inspiring. During my trip I met a variety of people, made many useful contacts, and learned about research opportunities, and career options in other countries. It was particularly enjoyable to meet authors of publications that have been useful in my PhD. These opportunities have enabled me to see where my work fits in, and that it is novel, highly relevant, and of interest internationally.

I would like to sincerely thank NZMSS for providing support for overseas conference travel, without such funding opportunities this would not have been possible. The experience has been a highlight of my PhD, and will no doubt benefit my career; I have learned a lot, gained a great deal of confidence, and made many useful connections.