

Estuarine and Coastal Sciences Association annual conference (ECSA 55: Unbound boundaries and shifting baselines: Estuaries and coastal seas in a changing world), London, UK, September 6-9, 2015

*Rebecca Gladstone-Gallagher (PhD candidate, University of Waikato)*

In September 2015, with the support of the New Zealand Marine Sciences Society first overseas conference travel award, I travelled to London to attend my first international conference. The conference was run by the Estuarine and Coastal Sciences Association (ECSA), with the theme focused on estuaries and coastal seas in a changing world. My research fit the conference theme well, as it explores how detrital subsidies from marine macrophytes can influence benthic ecosystem function (primary production, community respiration and nutrient recycling). My research has relevance to coastal conservation in a changing world, as the distributions and supply of marine macrophyte detritus change with anthropogenic activities. I was fortunate to give an oral presentation in the “Interactions between biological, geochemical and physical processes: fluxes and functions” session and my presentation was entitled, “Macrophyte detrital subsidies influence soft sediment ecosystem function in a temperate estuary”. My presentation was well received and I was asked some relevant and interesting questions by the audience. Many people approached me after my talk to discuss the implications of my results, and this enabled me to make some valuable networks and contacts in several different countries.

Aside from the value of presenting my research to a wide and international audience, the conference also offered me some additional opportunities; the conference held a workshop designed for early career researchers and students on “Publishing and reviewing in international journals”. This publishing workshop was run by two editors of high ranking international journals, as well as an Elsevier journal publisher. The workshop was very insightful and important to me as an early career researcher, relatively new to the publishing and peer-review process. I picked up a lot of useful information that I will need to apply in the coming year as I progress to publish and submit my PhD research.

In addition to the ECSA conference in London, I also had the opportunity to attend and present an oral presentation at a second European conference. I attended the European Marine Biology Symposium (EMBS), which was held in Helgoland, Germany on 21-25 September, 2015. My presentation at this conference was in a session themed, “Drivers of ecosystem change in marine/coastal ecosystems”, and within this theme there were several very high quality talks that were extremely relevant to my research. Many of the sessions at the EMBS were tightly related to the benthic research we are doing in New Zealand (e.g. the “Biodiversity as a response or driver of change” session). This conference also allowed me to attend a number of talks that were on topics outside of my field, which was also a great chance to broaden my perspective and learn more about the different types of marine research happening in Europe. The conference had a large proportion of student delegates, and I have realised the importance of forging these relationships between fellow students. In addition, the small nature of this conference meant that I could meet and interact easily with many European researchers who are working in the same field, and these interactions I believe are invaluable to my future research and collaborations.

The timing of the two international conferences has been perfect, as I am now in the final write up stages of my thesis, and both conferences have made me realise that the research I am doing in New Zealand has international relevance and interest. Many of the discussions I had during both conferences have given me ideas on how to approach the interpretation of my results as I enter the final stage of my PhD. The conferences and the interactions that I have encountered during my trip

have given me some perspective of where the marine research that is being conducted in New Zealand fits into the global context.

I thank and acknowledge the New Zealand Marine Sciences Society for their generous contribution towards funding my first overseas conferences, and for their continued support of New Zealand students. I believe that these international interactions are instrumental to the success of young researchers in New Zealand, for fostering international collaborations and networks.