**NZMSS First Overseas Conference Travel Fund Report**

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INCISE – International Network for submarine Canyon Investigation and Scientific Exchange. November 4-7th, 2018 – Shenzhen, China.

When I hear the words ‘submarine canyon’ I get very excited. These habitats are incredibly dynamic hotspots of marine life, from tiny and bizarre benthic invertebrates to large deep-diving mammals. Yet there is so much we don’t know about their function and structure, or about how they respond to anthropogenic stressors. You can imagine how inspiring it was to attend a conference that was focused solely on the study and conservation of submarine canyons, and to spend four days with a group of scientists that share the same enthusiasm.

I sincerely thank the New Zealand Marine Sciences Society for supporting my travel to my first overseas conference. I presented my research on the foraging ecology of sperm whales in the submarine canyon of Kaikōura, NZ. I received helpful feedback and ideas for future research, and there was appreciation for bringing top predators into the discussion of canyon ecology. Conference presentations spanned across many fields of research, including biology, oceanography, ecology, geology, anthropogenic disturbance and conservation management. This provided a unique opportunity to learn about canyons from different perspectives, which expanded my knowledge and helped to place my study within a bigger picture. Of particular insight was the importance of sedimentation processes and turbidity layers in canyons, which are strongly affected by anthropogenic activities.

This was a very small conference, with around 60 attendees. I had the chance to meet and speak to most people throughout the conference, and made some positive contacts. There were no parallel sessions, so everyone had the chance to listen to every presentation. The structure of the sessions allowed for 5 min of questions after each talk, which resulted in productive discussions and feedback. There were also group discussions at the end of the conference, in which we debated as a scientific community what should be the next steps in submarine canyon research, and what are the major data gaps.

I thoroughly enjoyed this very special conference, which has developed my passion for marine science in general, and submarine canyons in particular. Thanks indeed to the NZMSS for supporting students and helping them grow.