The 18th International Conference on Harmful Algae - Nantes, France; October 22-26, 2018

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In October 2018, with the support of the New Zealand Marine Sciences Society first overseas conference travel award, I travelled to Nantes (France) to attend my first international conference. I attended the 18th ICHA – International Conference on Harmful Algae “From ecosystem to socio-ecosystems”. The conference was organised by IFREMER, the French institute for the research and exploitation of the oceans, whose ideas and values align with my thesis aims and has also a lot in common with my host institute, the Cawthron Institute.

I was fortunate to give an oral presentation in the “Toxin analysis – novel detection methods” session and my presentation was entitled “Micro-distribution of tetrodotoxin in the New Zealand clam *Paphies australis*”. 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 contacts in several different countries, working on very similar topics.

Aside from the value of presenting my research to a wide and international audience, the conference also offered some additional opportunities: I participated to the “Young Investigator Networking session” the day before the conference and made some valuable overseas contacts and learnt a lot about the networking side of a career in science. This session was very important to me as an early career researcher and it allowed me to meet other young researchers early on and had time to properly introduce ourselves during the week. I was also able to visit the IFREMER laboratories, which turned out to be very valuable and allowed me to compare equipment, methods and protocols that could be useful for the remaining of my PhD.

The timing of the conference was perfect. I was in the process of writing my second PhD thesis while I attended the conference and I was able to get advice from renowned scientists in our field on supplementary data and experiment to add to my chapter. That extra help and work dramatically improved my manuscript that has now been accepted for publication.

The conference was in France, my home country, and I was able to visit my family afterwards, which made the trip even better for me – I came back to New Zealand recharged and ready to work even harder.

I would like to sincerely acknowledge the New Zealand Marine Sciences Society for their contribution towards funding my first overseas conference, and for the continuous support of New Zealand students. I truly believe that international conferences are involved in the success of early career scientists in New Zealand and all around the world.