



Ōtākou
Whakaihu Waka
UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

Department of Marine Science
Te Tari Pūtaiao Taimoana

Postgraduate Research Opportunities

Marine Science | Aquaculture & Fisheries | Oceanography



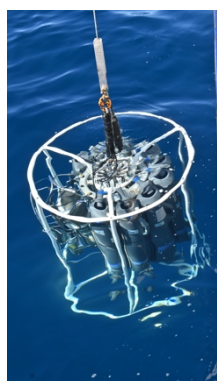
2026

A postgraduate degree in Marine Science lets you investigate the ocean on your own terms. At Otago, we offer opportunities for people who want to pursue research in the sea or who are interested in marine education or management. From life scientists to modellers to environmental managers, there is a marine postgraduate option for you. Marine Science Research stretches from the tropics to the poles: in labs, on boats, on land, on computers, in our heads and underwater.

Postgraduate Degrees in Marine Science at Otago

Degree	Description	Timing	Background needed
Bachelor of Science with Honours Aquaculture and Fisheries (120 points)	The BSc (Hons) in AQFI allows you to carry out a small field or lab-based research project while studying in the areas of aquaculture, human impacts, and fisheries.	Jan-Oct	BSc in related discipline
Bachelor of Science with Honours Marine Science (120 points)	The BSc (Hons) in MARI allows you to carry out a small field or lab-based research project while studying marine science papers.	Feb-Oct	BSc in related discipline
Postgraduate Diploma in Science Marine Science (120 pts)	The PGDipSci is a one-year degree that allows you to do a small research study. Students do a small desktop or field-based research project (40 points) and take four 400-level papers.	Feb-Oct	BSc in related discipline
Master's Degree Marine Science (240 pts)	The MSc in Marine Science is a two-year research degree. In the first year, students take papers and prepare a research proposal based on a field pilot study. In the second year, students carry out full-time independent research, leading to production of a thesis.	2 years beginning in Feb	BSc in related discipline
Master's Degree (thesis only) Marine Science	Students who have already carried out postgraduate study may be admitted to the research-only year of the MSc , to carry out independent research leading to production of a research thesis.	12 months from start date	BSc (Hons) or PGDipSci in related discipline or equivalent
Doctor of Philosophy	The PhD is the University's highest-level research degree. We accept only the very best students into this programme.	36 months from start date	BSc (Hons) or MSc in related discipline

Can I get in? We expect postgraduate students to have completed a BSc in a relevant science discipline with either an average of B (>70) overall, or an average of B+ (>75) over their final year of study (300-level papers). Applicants for a research-only degree (MSc thesis only or PhD) must present evidence of having carried out a large independent research project at B+ (75) or better.



ALL Postgraduate Research Students must have a project and a supervisor before they can be admitted. This booklet is designed to help you find the perfect match.

What if I have changed direction? If you have a Bachelor's degree but didn't study a discipline related to Marine Science, you can still change your mind. The Diploma for Graduates (**DipGrad**) allows you to take a year's worth of undergraduate papers in Marine Science in order to gain the skills you'll need for postgraduate study. Contact marine.course.advice@otago.ac.nz for details.

Marine Science Academic Staff and Research Projects

Liv Cornelissen

Research interests: Liv is a physical oceanographer with experience in both observational data analysis and ocean modelling. She is particularly interested in understanding the physical properties and dynamics of the ocean, including circulation, mixing, and air–sea interactions. Liv is keen to co-supervise projects that involve marine ecosystem questions, with a particular focus on supporting and strengthening the oceanographic component.

Contact: liv.cornelissen@otago.ac.nz



Dr Matt Desmond

Postdoctoral Fellow

Research interests: Kelp-forest ecology and physiology, algal aquaculture, habitat restoration, seafloor and habitat mapping.

Contact: matthew.desmond@otago.ac.nz

Dr Ursula Ellenberg

Research interests: Ursula is motivated by conservation issues; she enjoys employing novel technologies to understand how seabirds use their environment or respond to stressors. Her research emphasis is on conservation physiology, behavioural ecology, and human-wildlife interaction. Are you curious, hands-on, practical, independent, and self-motivated? Fantastic!

Contact: ursula.ellenberg@otago.ac.nz



Professor Crid Fraser

Research interests: 'Big picture' questions such as how do species get around, how do physical processes such as earthquakes influence biodiversity, and how does climate affect species' distributions.

Potential research projects: Do animals use volcanoes to get rid of their parasites? Will floating kelp and its animal passengers be able to colonise Antarctica in a warmer future world? Do heatwaves 'bleach' kelp, and up to what point can affected kelp recover? What diseases are jeopardising our kelp populations, and what environmental factors affect them? Most (but not all) projects include some genetic analyses as well as environmental or ecological data.

Contact: ceridwen.fraser@otago.ac.nz



Dr Gaya Gnanalingam

Research interests: aquaculture, fisheries, marine ecology, marine policy and law, habitat and fisheries restoration, customary fisheries management, population modelling, marine invertebrate ecology.

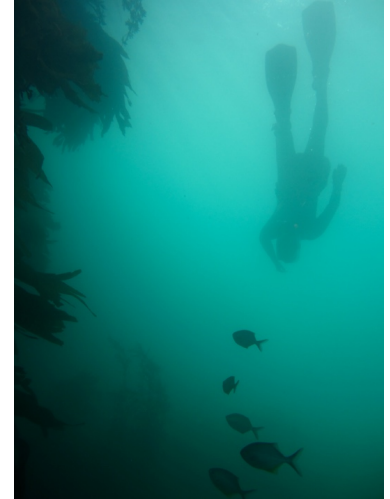
Contact: gaya.gnanalingam@otago.ac.nz



Professor Chris Hepburn

Research Interests: Seaweed ecophysiology, customary fisheries, impacts and control of invasive species, seaweed aquaculture, climate change impacts and mitigation, marine ecosystem restoration.

Contact: chris.hepburn@otago.ac.nz



Dr Rebecca James

Research Interests: Coastal vegetated ecosystems, estuaries, carbon and nutrient cycling, organic matter degradation, ecosystem services, sediment dynamics, coastal protection, spatial ecology, coastal restoration.

Contact: rebecca.james@otago.ac.nz



Professor Miles Lamare

Head of Department, Marine Science

Research Interests: Marine invertebrate ecology; Antarctic biology; echinoderms; tropical echinoderms; ecology and physiology of marine invertebrate larval

stages; response of invertebrates to future oceans.

Potential Research Projects: Climate induced changes in sea urchin population distributions, and the role of larval stages in expansion; tropical starfish growth and ecology; the response and adaptation of marine invertebrates to warming (heatwaves) and ocean acidification; Polar marine ecosystems; Boundary layers and newly settled marine species; Antarctic species responses to warming and acidification.

Contact: miles.lamare@otago.ac.nz





Dr Jean McKinnon

Research Interests: Abundance and diversity of Marine Plankton; Age, growth and diet of marine invertebrates, particularly cephalopod molluscs; behaviour of cephalopod molluscs; the effect of land use

on mudflat biodiversity; citizen science for collecting baseline data. **Contact:** jean.mckinnon@otago.ac.nz



Associate Professor Will Rayment

Research Interests: Ecology and conservation biology of cetaceans; capture-recapture methods and analyses; species-habitat relationships; efficacy of Marine Protected Areas and MPA networks; marine megafauna of the Otago coast - demographics, distribution and impacts. **Contact:** will.rayment@otago.ac.nz



Associate Professor Christina Riesselman

Joint appointment in Marine Science and Geology

Research Interests: Christina is a [paleoceanographer](#) studying how the ocean has changed through time. Her research group uses marine sediment cores, modern sediments and water column observations to reconstruct past climate and environmental change on timescales from a few thousand to many millions of years. They use diatoms, stable isotopes and other geochemical and sedimentological proxies to test everything from the stability of the Antarctic cryosphere to the efficiency of the Fiordland carbon cycle, from the strength of ancient ocean circulation to the sea level history of Otago Harbour.

Contact: christina.riesselman@otago.ac.nz



Dr Sarah Seabrook

Research Interests: Sarah's research group investigates how marine systems are responding to climate change, with a focus on carbon flux and emerging climate feedback. They work across environments ranging from Antarctic coastlines to remote deep-sea habitats, using a combination of field-based observations, autonomous

geochemical instrumentation, and biogeochemical sampling. The work takes an integrated, multidisciplinary approach that links connects biological, chemical, and physical processes to uncover the mechanisms governing ecosystem vulnerability and future change. Alongside this, they are actively engaged in science communication, media, and policy to translate our research into broader societal impact.

Contact: sarah.seabrook@otago.ac.nz



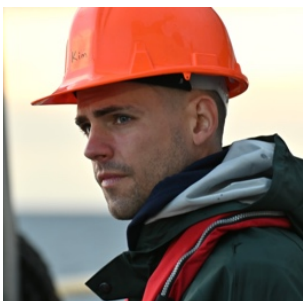
Dr Robert Smith

<https://twitter.com/robowainsmith>

Research Interests: Rob is an oceanographer. His research group tackle questions about the influence of ocean dynamics (e.g. wind, currents, stratification, tides) on marine ecosystems spanning kelp forests to the open-ocean. They have a growing interest in extreme oceanic events, including marine heatwaves. **Potential Research**

Projects: *What are the characteristics of subsurface marine heatwaves around New Zealand? How do the drivers of marine heatwaves influence phytoplankton blooms in the Southern Ocean? Does tidal mixing buffer our offshore islands from marine heatwaves? What are the factors that allow river plumes to impact distant kelp forests?*

Contact: robert.smith@otago.ac.nz



Dr Sebastiaan Van de Velde

Research interests: Sebastiaan is particularly fond of the seafloor and combines field work, laboratory incubations and numerical modelling. For example: natural (and enhanced) alkalinity generation in coastal marine sediments, human impacts on coastal seafloor carbon cycling, links between benthic faunal communities and seafloor biogeochemistry.

Contact: sebastiaan.vandavelde@otago.ac.nz



Professor Steve Wing

Research Interests: Steve's research group focusses broadly on marine ecology and fisheries with specific projects on food web and population structure of key coastal species such as rock lobsters, blue cod, sea lions, penguins and bivalves. Currently they are working on a large project on the role of lantern fishes in pelagic ecosystems, another on biodiversity and connectivity in the Antarctic ecosystem and a third on cumulative stressors in kelp forest ecosystems. There are multiple opportunities for postgraduate study in all three.

Contact: steve.wing@otago.ac.nz



Put Together Your Team

It is very common for Marine Science students to be co-supervised outside the Department. Feel free to work with your primary supervisor to assemble the best possible supervisory committee for your research.

What next?

How to apply? Use the “Apply Now” button at <https://www.otago.ac.nz/futurestudents>

When to apply? International applications are due by 31 October. Returning Otago students should apply by the end of November. Nevertheless, **candidates should talk to potential supervisors about projects and apply as soon as possible to ensure a place in their preferred area of interest.** Applications to PhD & MSc Thesis-Only can be submitted at any time.

Need more Info?

How much will it cost?

Fees information is here: <https://www.otago.ac.nz/study/fees>

Need money?

Scholarships information is here: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/scholarships/>

Have a more specific question?

Contact us at:

marine.courseadvice@otago.ac.nz





Marine Science Postgrad Papers 2026

Fourth-year students enrol in:

- MARI 401
- One of the 480/490/495 research papers
- and additional papers to reach a total of 120 points

MARI 401 20 pts	Advanced Methods in Marine Science	Feb-May	Focus on research skills and study design, culminating in a week-long field trip
MARI 403 20 pts	Critical Thinking for Environmental Scientists	Feb-Jun	Students lead seminar discussions about major papers focussing on marine issues
MARI 429 20 pts	Coastal Marine Environment	Feb-Oct	Field-based course: design and carry out coastal marine sampling transects
MARI 431 20 pts	Antarctic and Southern Ocean Science	Jul-Oct	Physical science of the Southern Ocean and poles through labs and seminars
AQFI 421 20 pts	Advanced Aquaculture and Fisheries	Feb-Oct	Field-based course on coastal impacts and management, some diving/snorkelling
MARI 480 40 pts	Independent Project (for PGDipSci candidates)	Feb-Oct	Desktop research project carried out within the year
AQFI 490 60 pts	Dissertation (for BAppSc (hons) candidates)	Feb-Oct	Field or lab or data-based research project carried out within the year
MARI 490 60 pts	Dissertation (for BSc (hons) candidates)	Feb-Oct	Field or lab or data-based research project carried out within the year
MARI 495 40 pts	Master's Thesis Preparation (for MSc candidates)	Feb-Dec	Pilot study and proposal for research to be carried out in the second year
Postgraduate students may incorporate one paper in a different discipline into their degrees, with permission of the HOD or Fourth-Year Coordinator.			

*Do not upload a research proposal or enrol in MARI5F – that is for your fifth year.
Do not tick the box that says you are a research student or in your thesis year.*

More info at:

marine.courseadvice@otago.ac.nz