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## **NZ Association of Scientists Dismayed by University of Otago Plans to Sack Marine Scientists**

The University of Otago wants to sack three scientists from the nation's leading marine science academic department. The NZAS finds this potential loss of knowledge and capability alarming at a time when marine science, and training the next generation of marine scientists, has never been more critical.

Past President Associate Professor Craig Stevens said "we appreciate the need to be fiscally conservative when faced with uncertainty. However, what *IS* certain is that issues like sea level rise, marine heat waves, ocean acidification, river-borne pollution, aquaculture, renewable energy, and floating microplastics are growing in importance. All of these issues have a focal point in the ocean - and Aotearoa New Zealand is surrounded by ocean".

The responsibility of a high quality University goes far beyond bums on seats. There is a responsibility to support unique groups of researcher-teachers who have to be world class *AND* also highly connected to the local scene and challenges. For example, a unique feature of the Aotearoa New Zealand science sector is the connection to Māori. The marine environment is a major interface between western science and Mātauranga Māori - a challenging research area and one the Department excels in.

Stevens said "the review is sending a very negative message to marine science students - and is stressful for them and the staff involved". We have responded to the call for submissions on the plans by the University<sup>1</sup>.

The need to maintain boats and marine laboratories means science in the marine environment is expensive. We recognise that balancing the books can be challenging for any large organisation. However, in being a large University there can be ways to share costs that maintain and expand critical capacity. Stevens said "we recommend that the University consider alternate ways to do this in order to fulfil its mandate and support the future of the Nation".

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<sup>1</sup> <https://scientists.org.nz/resources/Documents/Submissions/NZAS-OtagoMarSci-Response.pdf>