



EUROPEAN CETACEAN SOCIETY



Society for Marine Mammalogy

29 March 2020

Dear Vice Chancellor Jan Thomas and Massey University Council,

We write on the behalf of the European Cetacean Society (ECS) and the Society of Marine Mammalogy (SMM), two scientific bodies comprising a total membership of over 2,300 scientists, managers and conservationists. Our societies aim to promote and advance the science and conservation of marine mammals. Our respective membership is concerned by reports that important marine mammal conservation projects are at significant risk in New Zealand due to proposed university cuts to the sciences.

We understand that Massey University has recently proposed to eliminate its natural sciences from its Albany campus, which among other significant losses, would result in the complete removal of a BSc in Marine Biology programme, along with its associated staff and students. Such programmes are of national and indeed international significance, have enhanced the diversity of students involved with STEM education, and have been supported financially or through collaboration by organizations such as the Association for Commonwealth Universities, The Royal Society of New Zealand Te Apārangi and the International Fund for Animal Welfare. We believe such dismantling of marine mammal research at Massey University will have significant detrimental impacts on critical welfare and conservation-based projects including programmes centred on tourism impacts and contaminant-disease associations for the endemic, endangered Hector's dolphin. Furthermore, Massey scientists currently lead international efforts to assess survivorship and welfare considerations during the rescue and response efforts of whale mass strandings – a phenomenon of unprecedented frequency in New Zealand.

ECS and SMM members believe that the loss of critical research programmes currently offered by Massey University scientists within New Zealand will have severe and possibly irreversible consequences for marine mammal conservation. In just two decades, more than 30 post-graduate theses, with their associated peer-reviewed outputs in the field of marine biology, have originated from Massey University researchers. Many of these outputs, achieved by a diverse collective of national and international Early Career Researchers, span Australasia, Europe, Asia, UK and USA. As such we are writing to express our collective concern about this situation and respectfully ask that the proposed removal of such significant conservation-based research be reassessed by the University Council and its Senior Leadership Team.

Sincerely,

Joan Gonzalvo, Chair  
European Cetacean Society

D. Ann Pabst, President  
Society for Marine Mammalogy