

MEDIA RELEASE

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AWARD WINNING TRIFECTA FOR INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER

New Zealand's largest independent research institute has scored the trifecta with another of its young scientists winning a prestigious international award to pursue research on shellfish aquaculture at one of the world's leading shellfish research institutes in Spain.

Dr Zoë Hilton is only the third New Zealander to have won a UNESCO - L'Oréal International Fellowship for Young Women in the Life Sciences.

It is an amazing achievement for Cawthron, as the two other New Zealanders who have won the award previously, Allison Haywood and Jenny Smith, also worked at The Cawthron Institute in the years they received their fellowships.

The award, one of just 15 offered to outstanding young female scientists from around the globe, is part of an international programme administered by UNESCO and designed to facilitate international exchanges for research projects in some of the world's best laboratories.

The fellowships are awarded to "young women who demonstrate outstanding intellectual promise and personal qualities, for research projects that demonstrate innovation, creativity and relevance, and which are likely to contribute to enhance knowledge in the life sciences".

"It was so competitive I didn't think I would have a chance, but my manager, who knew how much I wanted to get more overseas experience, encouraged me to apply and I am so glad she did," Dr Hilton says.

She will use this prestigious award to further her study into the captive breeding of *Ostrea edulis* and *Ostrea chilensis* - the European and New Zealand flat oyster.

“It is a tremendous opportunity not only to learn from others working in this field, creating collaborations and developing international contacts, but to also gain valuable exposure for our research which is usually hard to get.”

For Dr Hilton, whose academic career combined studies in marine and environmental science with Spanish, it will mean six months at Spain’s Institute for Food and Agriculture Research and Technology (IRTA) investigating larval nutrition and the brooding environment in the European flat oyster, *Ostrea edulis*.

IRTA Director, Dr Dolores Furones, who visited Cawthron earlier this year, says they are very much looking forward to having Zoë working with them.

“We believe her experience will be very interesting for us, given the work she is involved in with the New Zealand shellfish industry.

“Both Cawthron and IRTA have many areas of common interest between us, not only related to shellfish aquaculture, but also with shellfish pathology and food safety, and I can see benefit for both of us from the sharing of knowledge through the sharing of staff.”

Cawthron CEO, Gillian Wratt is particularly pleased, not only that another of the Institute’s rising stars has won such a prestigious award, but also for the opportunity to build this new collaboration.

“Not only will it be extremely beneficial in Zoë’s career development and in the transfer of knowledge between the two institutions, but the results will have far reaching impacts in the development of sustainable aquaculture for these iconic oyster species.”

In awarding the fellowship, UNESCO Secretary General, Elizabeth Rose, described Dr Hilton as an extraordinary young woman, an inspiration to other New Zealanders and someone whose work is already helping to tackle global issues facing our communities.

She will officially receive her award during a week-long event sponsored by UNESCO and L’Oreal in Paris in March 2012 and undertake the fellowship work in the first half of 2013 in Spain.

Dr Hilton, an early career researcher investigating energy dynamics in various shellfish species as part of the Cawthron Institute’s world leading cultured shellfish research programme in Nelson, is thrilled and incredibly grateful to have been awarded such an opportunity.

“I’m bracing myself for how many times people are going to make the joke that ‘now the world is your oyster!’” As cliché as it sounds, it truly is, in more ways than one.

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Image details: Images available on request

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