

## Scholarship Applications Sought

*Applications for a \$10,000 scholarship from Environment Canterbury will remain open into October, despite an official closing date of 1 October.*

HR advisor Janet MacDougall says the annual scholarship is open to graduates from Canterbury, Lincoln and Otago Universities to reinforce the strong ties Environment Canterbury has with these universities. As well as the \$10,000 towards course costs and field work, the successful scholarship recipient receives the opportunity to work with Environment Canterbury over the summer holidays.

Last year ten applications for the scholarship were accepted, with Francine Smith from Canterbury University taking the prize. Twenty three year old Francine is working towards her PHD in Chemistry and Biology, and says the scholarship was invaluable in assisting her financially, as well as providing access to experts in her chosen study area.

"I had a meeting with a senior staff member which was very helpful. I think it's fantastic to have this opportunity, especially if you want to work for Environment Canterbury." Francine is studying toxic algae in Canterbury waterways and found working with the regional council last summer particularly useful as she was able to travel with staff to North Canterbury rivers to undertake sampling. The scholarship has been valuable for her research and Environment Canterbury staff have also helped her source data for her studies.

While the effects of toxic algae are widely publicised, there is still a lot to learn about what causes algae and encourages its growth, says Francine. "It's a significant and world-wide environmental problem. Not a lot is known about what causes the toxins' production."

Francine is focusing on benthic mats; the algae responsible for the death of several dogs across the region and in other parts of the country. "It's quite a topical project and it would be brilliant if something good comes out of it."

While Francine isn't sure about her future career, she does know environmental research is an area she would like to continue in. "But not in a purely theoretical role. I like to have the practical side, the field work, that's what interests me."



Francine Smith

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If you would like to be taken off our database list, please email [habitatecan@ecan.govt.nz](mailto:habitatecan@ecan.govt.nz)  
Environment Canterbury, 58 Kilmore Street, Christchurch 8013

## Sonar 6 *Most employees dread performance review time, but at Environment Canterbury a new online performance management system has attracted surprising accolades.*

The Sonar 6 online system was introduced late last year after an organisational review discovered employees at Environment Canterbury felt previous performance reviews were cumbersome and didn't always reflect a staff member's contribution during the year. HR advisor Janet MacDougall says previous paper-based systems didn't always generate quality data and weren't user friendly for staff or managers.

The Sonar 6 system allows staff to log on when they feel like it to record their achievements, measure their performance

against set goals and make notes on projects that they have been involved in.

Janet says staff describe Sonar 6 as flexible and low maintenance. Currently the system is being reviewed to take on board comments from staff who have used it in the past year, and a new upgraded version is due out soon.

"We have surveyed staff about it and the feedback was generally that it's good. People say it's quick once you know how to use it. They are now taking it in their stride."

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James Hoban, a Resource Care Coordinator, says the system is easy to use and from his perspective, it has made performance reviews more consistent. He likes how he can set his own goals with his manager and then log in to see how he's faring against them.

"We used to have an informal chat, which was good but everyone did something slightly different. Having a structure certainly makes it easier to follow and it keeps everyone on task." James, who has been at Environment Canterbury two years, says overall the system is fairer for a range of staff, and he finds it "pretty painless".

Denise Thompson, a Team Leader for the Records and Archives section, says Sonar 6 has helped her recognize the achievements of her team. "It's very easy to use once you have worked out what all the buttons do." Denise finds meeting with staff members around a PC to discuss performance simpler than sifting through paper records. "It's good for staff in the team in that I can take notes throughout the year to capture all their

*"It's very easy to use once you have worked out what all the buttons do."*

achievements. It's helped give some structure to something that can be quite ad hoc."

Dick Pilbrow, who has worked at Environment Canterbury for 25 years, has seen performance management systems come and go, but says Sonar 6 is shaping up to be the best.

The Enforcement Officer says being able to put comments in when you feel like it, and then read your manager's comments in response when you meet up - means feedback goes both ways. Having regular meetings throughout the year using Sonar 6 also means there are 'no surprises' for both parties when performance reviews are completed.

While Dick mentions some teething problems with getting the system up and running, he acknowledges many of these concerns have been addressed and he has appreciated the chance to feedback on the system. "This is possibly the fourth or fifth one (performance system) that I have seen. Once they have sorted out a few of the problems we encountered the first time around, it will be the best system I've been involved with."

## Community Resilience under spotlight

*Getting people to think about how prepared they are for a natural disaster or how they will adapt to climate change are among the aims of Environment Canterbury's new Community Resilience Unit.*

The unit was set up a year ago to act as a think tank and come up with recommendations for future programmes to build resilience in the community. Unit manager Bill Simpson defines resilience as 'the ability to cope with change' and says the unit hopes to challenge people's thinking around how they will cope with either sudden change or long term changes such as when food or water supply is threatened or transport and travel patterns need to adjust to higher oil prices.

"We're trying to encourage people to become more sustainable and look at their own individual resilience. We're asking people how will you cope with change?" Staff have been seconded from other parts of Environment Canterbury and are trialing different techniques. In the Mt Lyford community inland from Kaikoura and at Leithfield Beach in North Canterbury, one-on-one sessions with residents under the Ready Canterbury programme have been held. The sessions prompt residents to list the threats, issues and concerns they hold for their communities. Householders then assess how well prepared they are to meet those challenges and are encouraged to choose different actions to better prepare themselves for change.

"We pose the questions and try and let people come up with their own answers as much as possible," says Bill. Staff follow up two weeks later to see what actions have been implemented and amazingly, in both Lyford and Leithfield Beach, 50% of the identified actions had already been put in place. "It's a very high impact tool as far as behavior change afterwards," says Bill.

Another tool the team hopes to test out is the use of a programme variously called Travel Smart or Go Smart. Educators currently go into schools to conduct air quality, transport, and water quality programmes with students and teachers. But in the future the educators may offer another programme aimed at the parents and families, Board of Trustee members and staff about their travel needs. Typically these would be one-on-one sessions to



*School students participating in the water quality programme*

discuss alternative travel options that may be more sustainable. Bill says the approach appeals as people would get to discuss the perceived barriers and issues to changing how they travel, and more individualized plans can be designed.

The Community Resilience Unit's brief is to come up with a report after two years identifying future programmes to build resilience. Bill says the work is cutting-edge as no-one globally has tried to influence behavior change at the household-level in the environmental and emergency management areas simultaneously. Many universities are studying these concerns and Canterbury and Massey Universities have shown interest in a longer term assessment of ongoing behaviour change in Canterbury.

As well as the external trials, the unit works with Environment Canterbury's own staff to further improve "greening of the organisation".

At the moment, water use, waste management and paper use are under the spotlight. There are also moves to help staff better plan their own travel as well. Bill says it's an exhilarating time to be reviewing community resilience as the topic will only become more relevant.