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# MSc Marine Systems & Policies

Prof. Murray Roberts, Programme Director & Dr. Lea-Anne Henry, Cohort Lead  
20 November 2025

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# Who are we?

- We're here to help:
  - Programme Director
    - Murray Roberts
  - Cohort Lead
    - Lea-Anne Henry
  - Programme Administrator
    - Sarah Jones



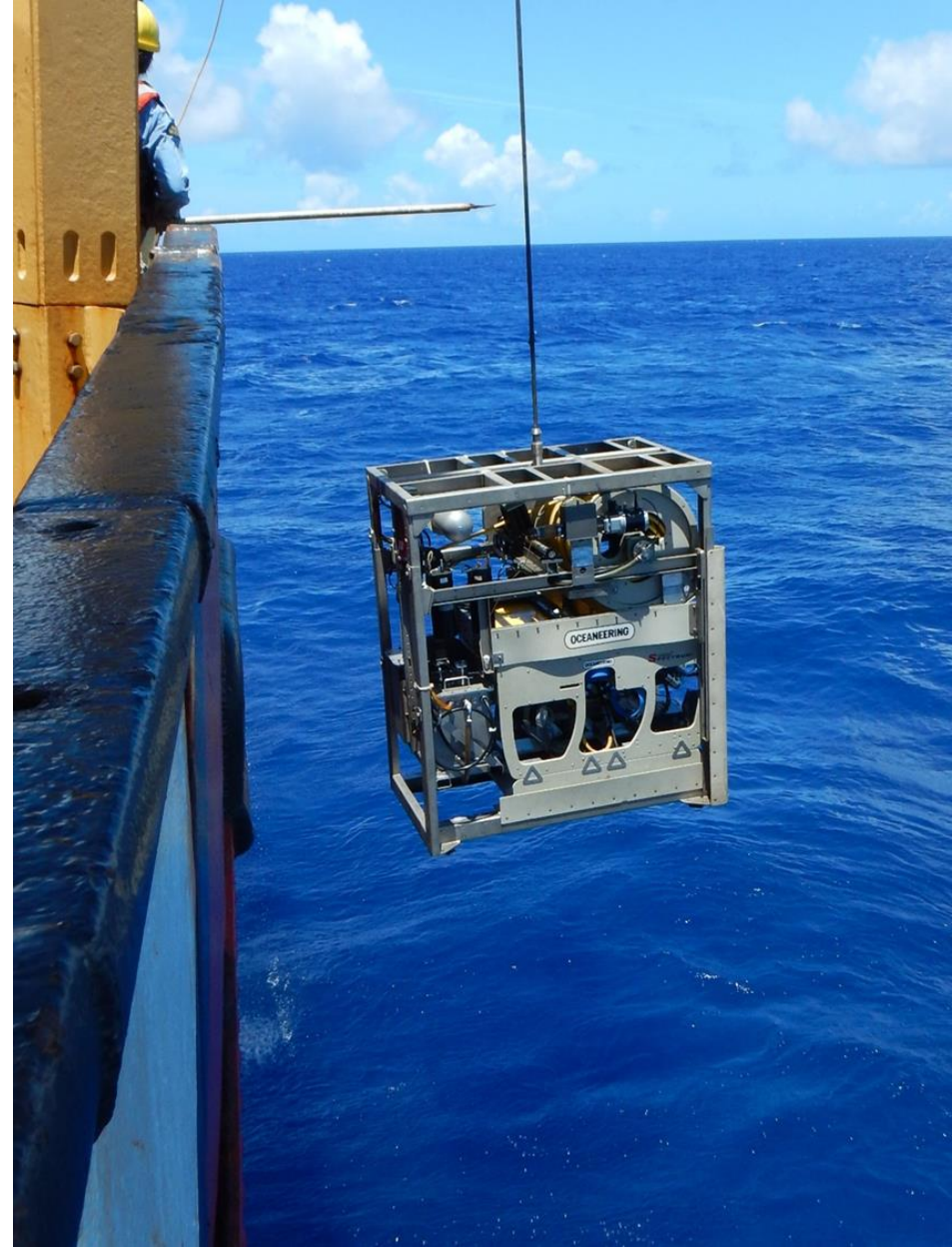
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# Why study marine science with policy?

- Fast-moving front & many ways for you to translate science and other forms of knowledge into policy & impact



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# Why study marine science with policy?

- For example, after decades of scientific research and campaigning, we have:
  - a treaty on human use and the protection, management and benefit-sharing of Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)



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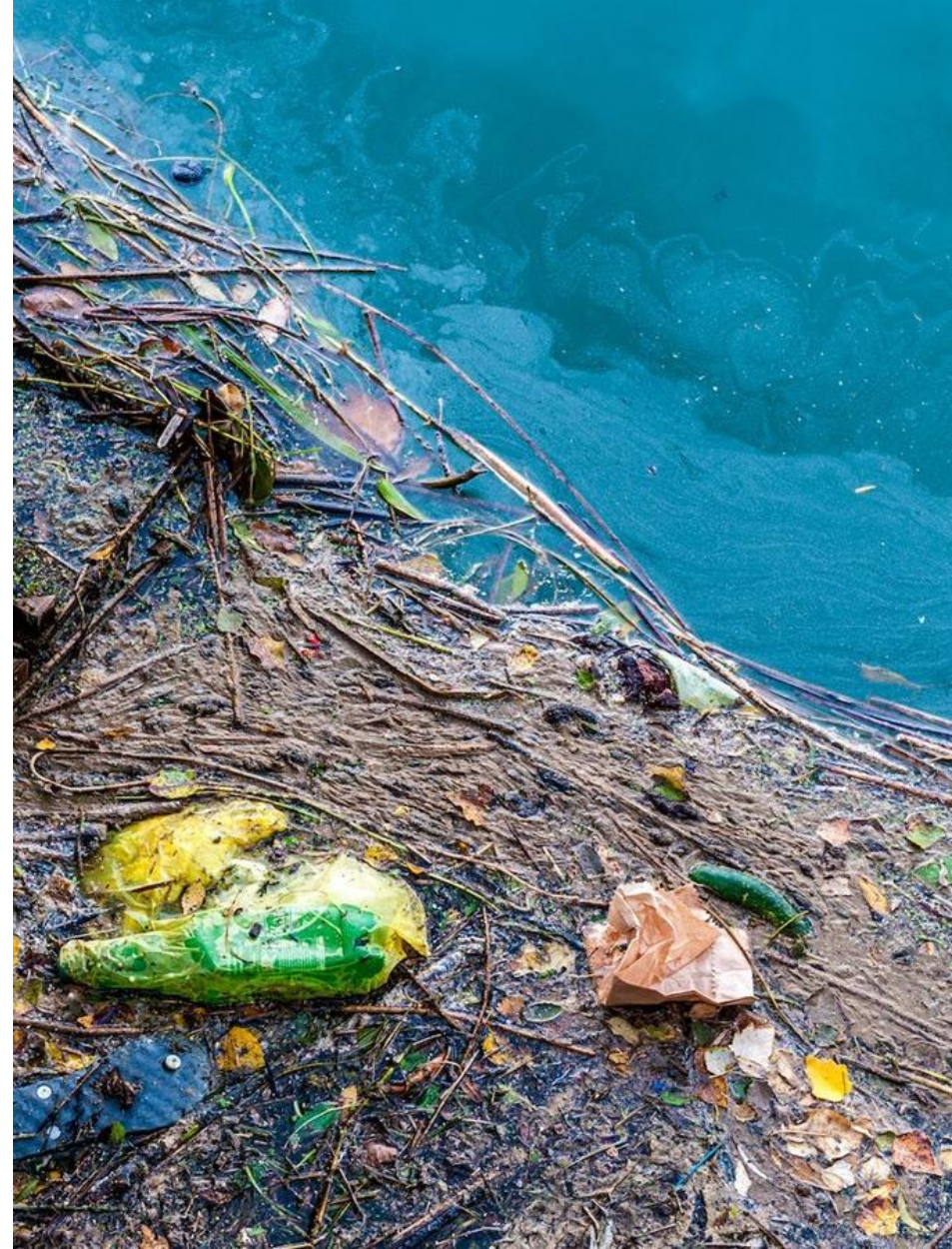
# Why study marine science with policy?

- For example, after decades of scientific research and campaigning, we have:
  - legal bans or restrictions on whales and dolphins in captivity; rights of nature movements



# Why study marine science with policy?

- For example, after decades of scientific research and campaigning, we have:
  - a new Plastics Treaty



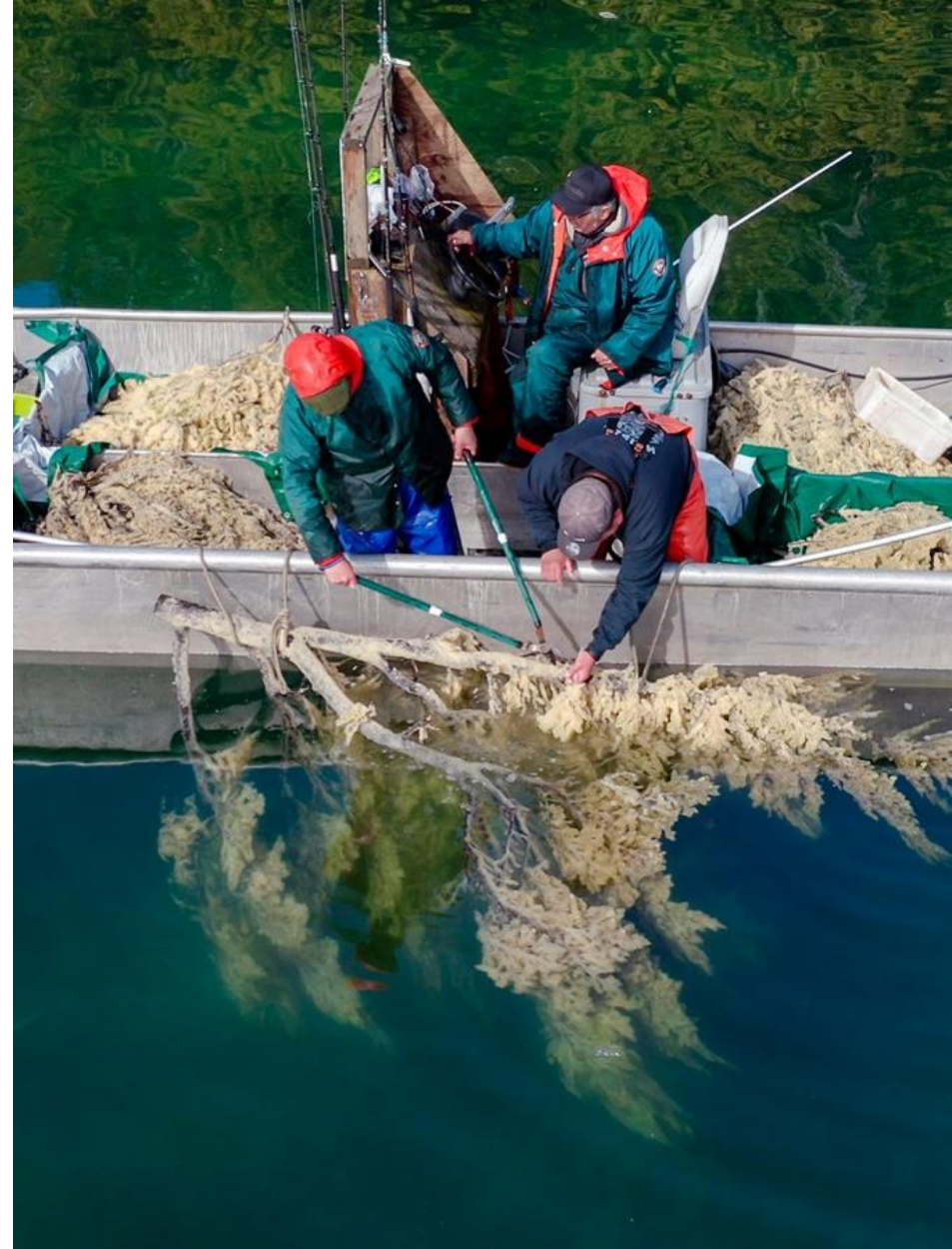
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# Why study marine science with policy?

- Instantly connects you to stakeholders and the human dimension in general
  - For example, the new Global Biodiversity Framework legally recognises the critical role of indigenous peoples and local communities



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# Why study marine science with policy?

- For example, illegal, unreported, unregulated (IUU) fishing is sometimes linked to forced labour and slavery
  - (IUU is in part being tackled by the 2022 WTO's Fisheries Subsidies Agreement after a weight of scientific evidence and advocacy campaigns)





# Our MSc vs MSc in Law

- What policies exist?
  - Skill: link ecosystems and issues to policies (including laws)
- Are policies effective?
  - Skill: collect and analyse scientific evidence, is the science good enough?



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# Our MSc vs MSc in Law

- Is policy reform needed & how?
  - Skill: use evidence base to critically evaluate
- How do I engage with policy processes?
  - Skill: learn the best channels to communicate science to decision-makers



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# Programme focus

- We focus on:
  - Marine science, nature conservation & marine planning\*
- Course work
  - policies for ecosystems\*
  - policies for marine planning & development\*
  - international focus but with domestic case studies



# Programme focus

- Breakfast briefings, guest experts, reading groups, course assignments, dissertations
  - issue-based policies (e.g., plastics, illegal fishing, geopolitics)
  - sectoral policies (e.g., fisheries)





# How do we teach?

- Research-informed teaching
  - learn from research, learn to do research
- Experiential learning
  - learn by doing and reflecting
- Devices we use:
  - Lectures
  - Flipped classrooms
  - Serious gaming
  - Field trips
  - Guest experts



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# How do we teach?

- Opportunistic skills workshops
  - QGIS
  - NVivo
  - Reef fish ethograms
  - R Coding Club





# Assessment

- Assessments can include:
  - critical essays
  - policy briefs
  - presentations
  - role play or simulation activities
  - data analysis reports



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# Field trips

- Local day trips
- April field course
- Please note that field course locations may vary year to year, but will always align with course learning outcomes



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# Resources

- You will have various resources available during your studies:
  - Learn platform
  - Programme Handbook
  - Dissertation Handbook
  - Course Handbooks
  - Guest speakers & MSc alumni
  - 1 Marine Conference
  - Breakfast Briefings



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# Programme structure

Find a full list of compulsory and option courses on the [Degree Programme Tables](#)

Compulsory Courses	Semester	Credits
Marine Ecosystems and Policies	Semester 1	20
Corals in a Changing Ocean	Semester 2	20
Marine Field Methods in Research and Practice	Semester 2	20
Research project/dissertation	April - August	60
2 option courses	1 per semester	40



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# Part-time structure

- A two part-time option is available
- We recommend living within a commutable distance from Edinburgh in order to undertake part-time study, and we encourage you to contact us to discuss part-time study in more detail
- Year 1:
  - 4 compulsory courses
- Year 2:
  - Research project/dissertation
  - 2 option courses



# Semester 1 - Foundations

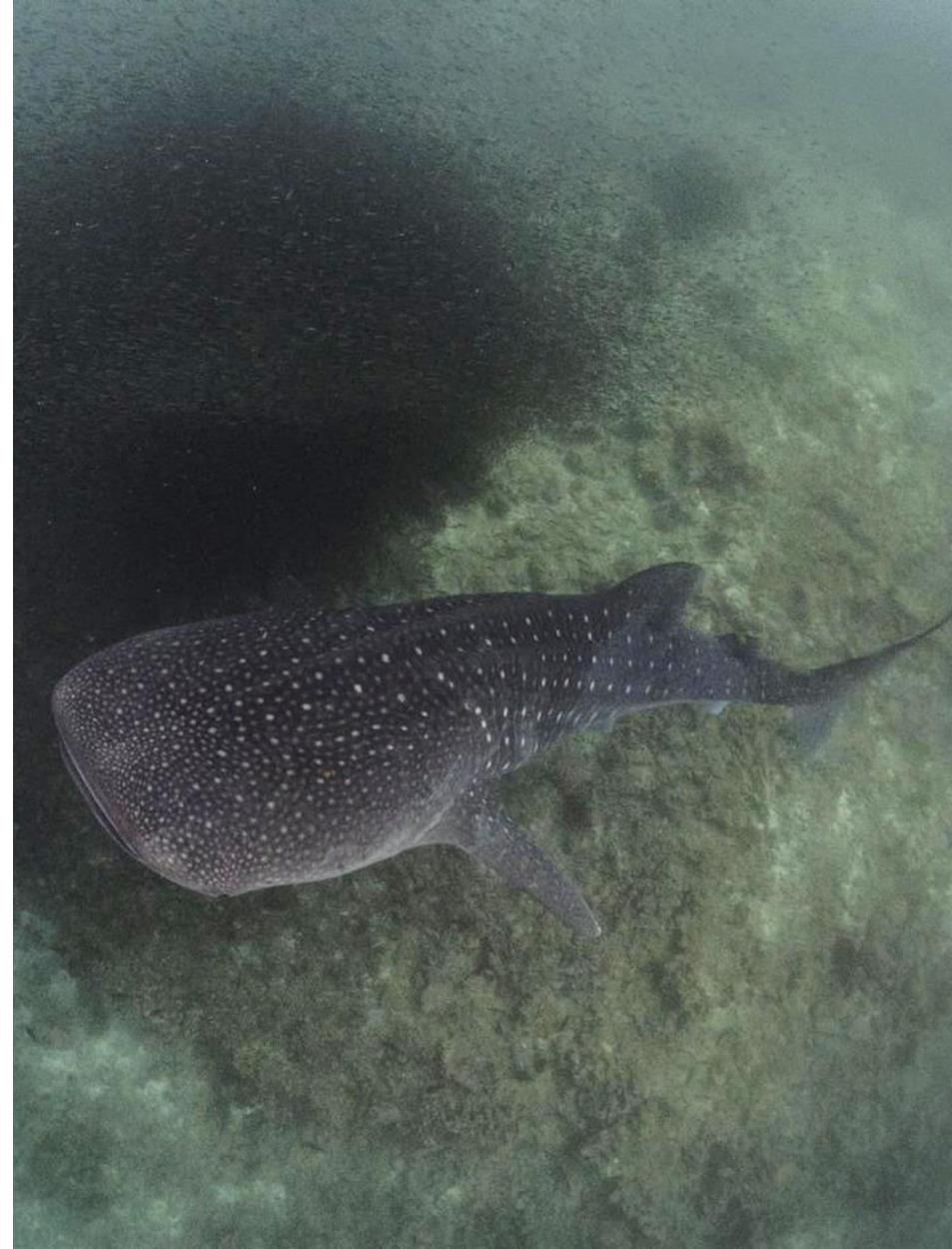
- Weekly Breakfast Briefings
  - Informal student-led discussion group on the science to policy interface
- Marine Ecosystems & Policies
  - Ecosystem science and relevant policies
  - + optional courses
  - + 1 conference (MASTS)
  - + dissertation ideas
  - + mixer event





# Semester 2 – Science and Policy in Practice

- Maldives Reading Group
  - Mondays
- Corals in a Changing Ocean
  - Ecosystem science, scientific skills development, relevant policies
- Marine Methods in Research & Practice
  - Ecological and social science applied in an overseas context
  - + optional course
  - + hardcore dissertation planning
  - + pool sessions



# Field course

- Semester 2
  - techniques development and UK coasts
- Investigations into pressures on marine ecosystems and communities
- Skills:
  - Interviews
  - Group data collection with individual project analysis





# Dissertation – Semester 3

- “Research Project in Marine Systems & Policies”
  - Independent research project
- Conduct an inquiry-based research project on a marine topic of your choice:
  - Field, lab, desk-based, internship, work placement
  - Typically 10,000-15,000 words
- Supervisor
  - internal or external - governments, NGOs, industries, organisations
- <https://www.ed.ac.uk/oceans>



# Previous dissertation topics

- The rights of Southern Resident killer whales
- Pilot study on the use of drones to study humpback whales in Iceland
- Threats from illegal fishing and capacity for enforcement in Indonesia
- Using baited remote underwater vehicle systems to study the distribution and diversity of sharks in South Africa





# Dissertation – Timeline

- Consider a topic (Sem. 1)
- Produce an over-arching research question, design a method/plan to answer that question
- October – November: **MASTS conference**
- November – December: **Dissertation mixer event**
- January: **Topic confirmed**
- March: **Forms submitted**
- May – August: **Write up**



# What a typical week looks like...

Semester 1, Week 4	
Classes	Timetable
Marine Ecosystems and Policies – Lecture	Fri, 09:00-13:00
Sustainable Marine Development – Lecture	Tue, 14:10-17:00
Option course: Coastal Environments and Communities – Lecture	Wed, 09:00-13:00
Total class hours	Roughly 11hrs

- Please note that the option course listed is just an example – hours will vary depending on the option courses you choose.





# Independent study and other activities

- You will also need to take into account your X independent study hours.
- How and where do students engage with teaching staff and other students?
- Where does independent study happen?
- Any other events or activities?



# Your class

- 20 – 30 students maximum
- 1/3 from UK, rest overseas
- 1/2 with scientific backgrounds
- 1/2 from law, international development, communications, journalism, social and political science, philosophy
- 101 applicants for 2025 entry
- 23 new students on programme in 2025/26 (20 FT and 3 PT)



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# Your future career

- We are proud of our graduates, and many have gone on to jobs in government, NGOs, industry and academia around the world
  - WWF
  - RSPB
  - Pew Charitable Trusts
  - World Wide Fund for Nature
  - Global Fishing Watch
  - Blue Ventures
  - Blue Marine Foundation
- A lot go on to do PhDs !



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# When to apply?

- Due to high demand for this programme, we operate on a series of early application deadlines.
- We strongly recommend you apply as early as possible.
- You should avoid applying to more than one degree. Applicants who can demonstrate their understanding and commitment to a specific programme are preferred.
- If you plan to apply to more than one programme, you should discuss your choices with us before you submit your application.
- Where possible, we may make an alternative programme offer if you have been unsuccessful in your chosen programme.



# Scholarships and funding

- Featured funding
  - [ScottishPower Master Scholarships](#)
  - [Chevening Scholarships](#)
- School of GeoSciences scholarships
  - [See potential funding for GeoSciences students](#)
- You are encouraged to research the range of potential scholarships and other funding outside the University for which you may be eligible
  - [Search for funding](#)



# Next steps...

<https://edin.ac/student-chat-pg>



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# Contact details for follow-up questions

- We apologise if we did not get through all of your questions in the time allotted for this session. If you have further questions that have not been answered, please email: [futurestudents@ed.ac.uk](mailto:futurestudents@ed.ac.uk)
- Alternatively, you can contact Professor Murray Roberts at: [Murray.Roberts@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Murray.Roberts@ed.ac.uk)





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# Thank you

Murray Roberts and Lea-Anne Henry

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