



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

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

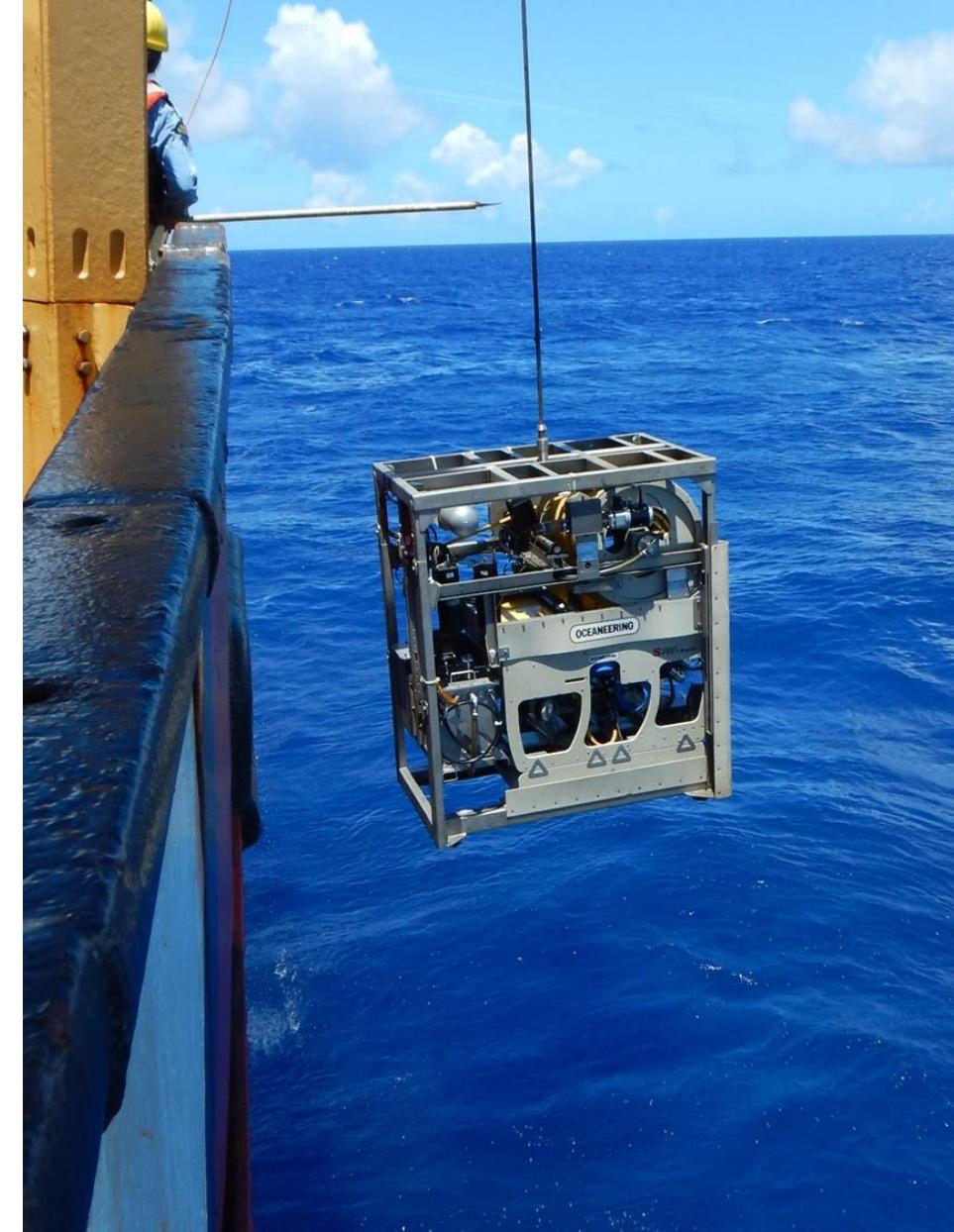


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Why study marine science with policy?

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



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)



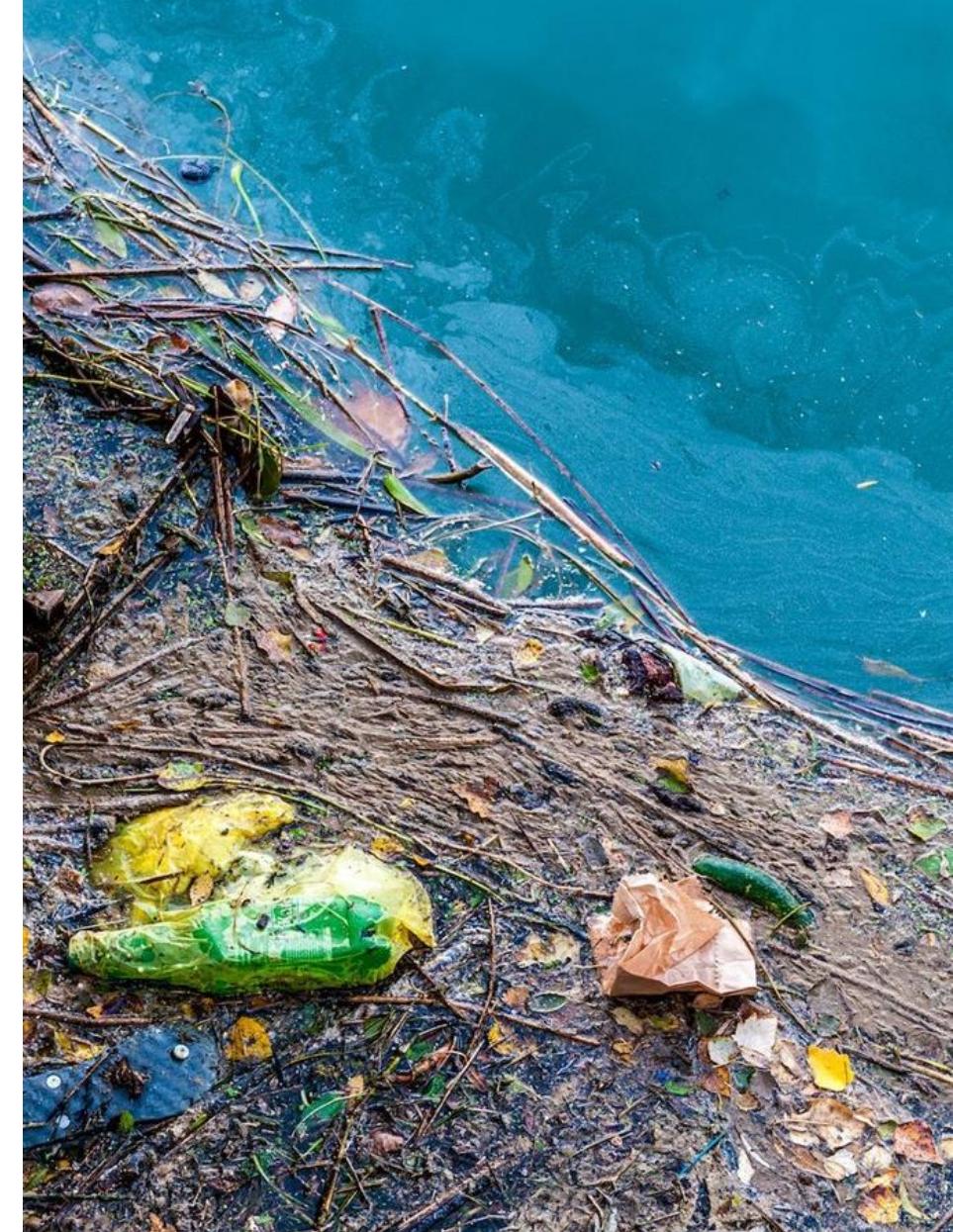
Why study marine science with policy?

- 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



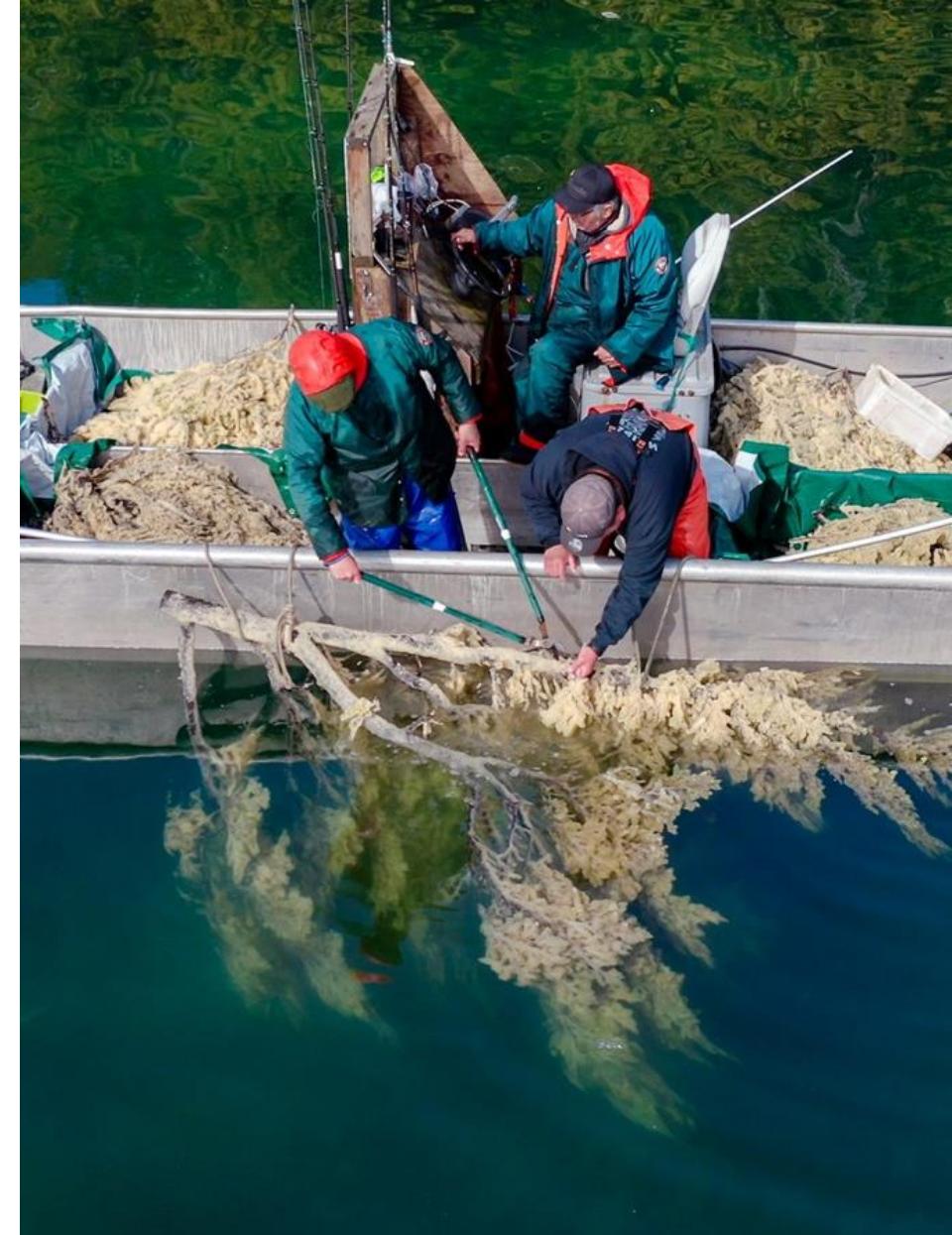
Why study marine science with policy?

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



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



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



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



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



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



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 !



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
- Alternatively, you can contact Professor Murray Roberts at: Murray.Roberts@ed.ac.uk





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Thank you

Murray Roberts and Lea-Anne Henry

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