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*Busy, busy, busy!*

*Congratulations to Pulasthi and Georgia for having their PhDs accepted - fabulous milestone to reach! It's been time for us to get our teeth into our "new" A3P projects, with literature reviews and shaping project direction. We've been presenting and attending conferences -SETAC EU and presenting our research results to a wider audience. Also receiving awards for research excellence- Congratulations to Claudette and Jackie! While field work for significant projects (like Sediment Quality Monitoring) are now complete. Supporting our PhD & Masters candidates, 3<sup>rd</sup> year student projects and Year 10 work experience students- continue with fantastic shared experiences and outcomes.*

**Congratulations Claudette and Jackie!!**



L-R: Dr Claudette Kellar and Dr Jackie Myers with Jackie's Award

Congratulations to Dr **Claudette Kellar** and Dr **Jackie Myers** for both receiving an RMIT School of Science Early Career Researcher Award for excellent performance in research in 2023. Hard earned and well done, well deserved to both of you! Claudette hasn't received her physical award yet, as she was busy at Armstrong's Creek doing some of the research she's been awarded for!

## Latest Joint Webinar- Below the surface: micro-pollutant study of Port Phillip Bay with Deakin University Hosted by PPB EcoCentre



On 18 Jun 2024 Port Phillip Bay EcoCentre hosted a joint seminar: Below the Surface: What a micro-pollutant study reveals about bay health; presented by AQUEST's own Dr **Jackie Myers** and Deakin University's Dr Morgan Ellis. The project was funded by the Victorian State Government. We had 64 people attend on the night and a very engaging discussion of the results. For those unable to make it, the webinar is available on our website. Well done Jackie and Morgan on a fantastic presentation and to Tyler King and Sabrina Trocini at PPB EcoCentre for hosting.

## PhD candidates presenting at SETAC EU

Two of our PhD candidates **Tanya Paige** and **Pulasthi Serasinghe** have presented their work at SETAC EU in Seville, Spain (the 34th conference of the European chapter of the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry). While joining them at the SETAC conference, Prof Vin Pettigrove travelled via Italy to visit our PhD candidate Caterina Cacciatori and fellow supervisors at the JRC EU (Joint Research Centre of the European Commission). He was then hosted at RMIT's European campus in Barcelona, all providing a fabulous exchange of knowledge and collaborative opportunities to enrich our research group, partnerships and the broader RMIT community.

Well done all, shown here enjoying the sites of Seville and the fruits of their labour.

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*Pulasthi Serasinghe, Tanya Paige and Vincent Pettigrove enjoy the sights in Seville 2024*

## Student project highlights

Well done to **Pulasthi Serasinghe** (supervised by Vincent Pettigrove, Dayanthi Nugegoda, Saman Buddhadasa and Hao Nguyen) for having his PhD thesis signed off as complete. His work was titled “Advancing Detection Strategies for Emerging Pesticides in Surface Waters” and involved publishing 2 papers to date <https://scholar.google.com.au/citations?user=RMA5M3cAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=ao> and presenting his work internationally. Big milestone for him and for the group- Congratulations! Pulasthi is currently employed by AQUEST.

Further, congratulations to **Georgia Sinclair** (supervised by Oliver Jones and Sara Long) who has just had her final PhD thesis signed off. Georgia studied PFAS and their effects on aquatic ecosystems, with 10 publications (9 papers and 1 book chapter)! <https://scholar.google.com.au/citations?user=4NUG5m4AAAAJ&hl=en>

Her work has been presented at numerous conferences and to the Heads of EPA AU and NZ. She recently secured a postdoctoral with the CSIRO in Brisbane studying PFAS in turtles! Congratulations!

Furious writing continues for our other late-stage PhDs. While **Caterina Cacciatori** has her first PhD paper out on her project “The Gems of Water”, with a second on its way. Hooray!

And our 1<sup>st</sup> year student, **Behzad Pournouri**, looking at the impacts of climate change and pollution on freshwater macroinvertebrates, successfully completing his 1<sup>st</sup> year Confirmation of Candidature this week, with Anuradha Athawuda who’s focusing on Sources and fate of microplastics in Westernport Catchments presenting on Friday.

Adding to our PhD candidate numbers **Gina Monschein** recently transitioned from staff to PhD student and will be looking at paratya shrimp.

We’ve again hosted some Year 10 work experience students, who have enjoyed their experience of lab, field and office work. With the fieldwork always favourite, but laboratory work a close second.

## From the field



*Michael Clark was with Sara Long and a work experience student collecting water quality samples at Seaford Wetland.*

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## Recent Publications

Here is a list of recent publications authored by members of AQUEST:

- Cacciatori C, Mariani G, Comero S, Marin D, Cabrera M, Bon-Tavarnese J, Gaggstatter J, Tavazzi S, Maffettone R, Myers J, Pettigrove V and Gawlik BM (2024) "The Gems of Water": a co-created scientist citizen approach for water quality monitoring. *Front. Water* 6:1358959. <http://doi.org/10.3389/frwa.2024.1358959>
- Paige, T., De Silva, T., Buddhadasa, S., Prasad, S. Nugegoda, D. and V. Pettigrove. Background concentrations and spatial distribution of PFAS in surface waters and sediments of the greater Melbourne area, Australia, *Chemosphere* 349 (2024), <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.chemosphere.2023.140791>.
- Serasinghe, P., Nguyen, H.T.K., Hepburn, C., Nugegoda, D. and V. Pettigrove. Use of passive sampling and high-resolution mass spectrometry for screening emerging pesticides of concern within surface waters, *Journal of Hazardous Materials Advances* 13 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hazadv.2024.100408>.

See our website for more publications, technical reports and project information: <http://rmit.edu.au/aquest>