

8-1-2012

## What a Difference a Hemisphere Makes!

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### Recommended Citation

Langendorfer, Stephen J. (2012) "What a Difference a Hemisphere Makes!" *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*: Vol. 6: No. 3, Article 2.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25035/ijare.06.03.02>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/ijare/vol6/iss3/2>

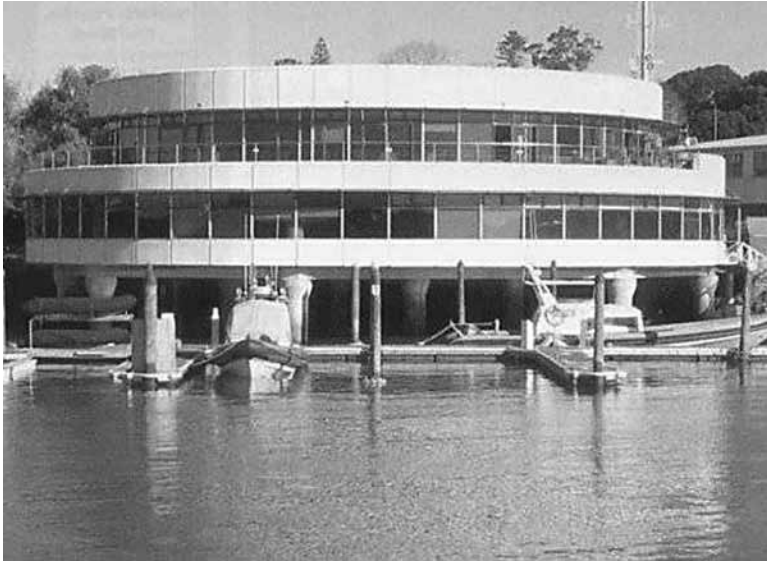
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## What a Difference a Hemisphere Makes!

As a resident of the U.S.A., I have always been somewhat envious of other countries such as Canada and Australia who seem to exhibit strong collaboration among their various national aquatic agencies. For example, I have always marveled at the nation-wide leadership that AUSTSWIM has provided for Australia in learn-to-swim and water safety. Similarly, the Canadian Royal Lifesaving and Canadian Red Cross had distinct missions to provide lifeguard instruction and water safety/learn-to-swim programs that seemed downright civilized compared to the plethora of aquatic agencies and programs in the U.S. Aside from the now-defunct Council for National Cooperation in Aquatics (CNCA) and the more recent U.S. Lifeguard Standards Coalition, aquatics in the U.S. during my career has too often seemed to be a “Babel” of American individualism—each agency for itself.

During the 2012 spring term, while I had a faculty improvement leave, my wife and I were hosted during a visit to New Zealand by *IJARE* Editorial Board member, Dr. Kevin Moran and his wife, Sian. I had been invited by the University of Auckland’s School of Education to be a “visiting scholar.” As anyone who has visited New Zealand or who is familiar with the legendary Kiwi hospitality can imagine, we had an absolutely marvelous, but all-too short, visit. Professionally, I learned an amazing amount about aquatics, New Zealand-style, much too much to share in this short essay. One important “take away message” I heard was the importance of aquatics to New Zealand life. Virtually the entire 4 million population of this island nation lives within an hour drive of a coastal area, which means that water plays a leading role in New Zealanders’ recreational activities. Of course, the inherent risks and hazards of surf and ocean environments increase the likelihood of drownings and other aquatic mishaps. Dr. Moran has chronicled some of these stories in his several articles published in *IJARE* previously. In particular, I was fascinated to visit one of the surf beaches where he had collected his data on the rock fishers and to see the actual rocky areas from which fishing occurs. In fact, while we were visiting, we saw a potential mishap in the making as one fisher dove into the surf to rescue a fishing pole being towed away by a stingray that had snagged the hook. Fortunately, the fisher who was not wearing a lifejacket or flotation of any kind managed to get back to safety on the rock. On another day with rougher surf, the outcome might not have been as benign.

More to the theme of this specific editorial, you may imagine my delight and admiration to discover a unique aquatic collaborative endeavor that exists among the New Zealand Coastguard Northern Region, Surf Lifesaving Northern Region, Maritime Police, and the Auckland Harbourmaster, all jointly housed at the Marine Rescue Centre located on Mechanics Bay along Auckland’s extensive waterfront and eastern harbor.



Auckland Marine Rescue Centre facility (photograph used with permission)

I had the great pleasure to briefly tour the Marine Rescue Centre (pictured herein) during the final day of my visit to New Zealand. What I found very interesting and valuable about the Marine Rescue Centre was the juxtaposition of these four major aquatic agencies with overlapping missions. As explained during my tour, by being housed and sharing the same secure waterfront facility allows these agencies to cooperate much more efficiently. Their staff shares resources and responsibilities, which allows for much shorter response times to aquatic emergencies. Simply by having a common telephone switchboard that monitors incoming calls makes a huge difference in decision making and responding.

The existence of a facility such as the Marine Rescue Centre makes great sense, especially because of the omnipresence of water and surf in New Zealand. Surprising is why other such facilities are not more commonplace. I do realize that the relatively small size of New Zealand makes interagency cooperation somewhat easier compared to larger countries such as Australia or the U.S. On the other hand, I wonder how difficult it actually might be in today's technological age to create at least virtual cooperative centers among our aquatic agencies.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I believe it behooves all aquatic agencies to consider cooperative models such as exemplified by Auckland's Marine Rescue Centre. Collaboration may not involve building or operating joint facilities, but it certainly could involve greater cooperation among agencies in creating and accepting each others' programs and certification. Rather than worrying about an agency's "market share," doesn't decreased drowning and enhanced water safety of the population serve the greater good?

*Steve Langendorfer, Editor  
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of Aquatic Research and Education*