

Rod Watson

Victorian Marine Science Consortium, Queenscliff, Vic
[Adapted from the nomination submitted for this Award]

If you were to ask any one of the hundreds of Victorian undergraduate and postgraduate students studying marine science if they could think of someone who has contributed greatly to the advancement of marine science in Australia through his innovative and consistently brilliant technical support, the resounding and collective answer would be “Rod Watson!”.



Rod Watson is the sole technical officer at the Victorian Marine Science Consortium (VMSC) which comprises five Victorian tertiary institutions, together with CSIRO, EPA Victoria, and the State Government’s Marine and Freshwater Fisheries Research Institute. It operates marine teaching and research laboratories at Queenscliff, on the entrance to Port Phillip Bay.

Rod has been employed at VMSC since its inception in 1990 and has supported over 210 postgraduate students conducting research on a range of research areas including marine biology, ecology, ecotoxicology, botany, aquaculture, fisheries ecology, physiology, ornithology, geomatics, marine protected areas, introduced species, oceanography and marine chemistry. Rod is always willing to work at awkward hours to accommodate students, often over weekends and in the middle of the night in freezing conditions. Rod provides students with invaluable advice on the design of field equipment and experiments and his good humoured nature is of enormous value to students, particularly in the field when working under extremely difficult conditions. He handles dangerous animals, spends nights away from home in cheap caravan parks, dives without a drysuit year round and works at ungodly hours, all with a grin and while having a good chat.

In the field, Rod’s knowledge of Port Phillip Bay and surrounding areas is second to none he provides students with the best information on suitable field work sites and species’ locations. He has a diverse knowledge on surrounding habitats and his ability to read the Bay’s unpredictable weather, tides, winds and swells means students are always able to get their work done in the most suitable and safe conditions. Rod’s boat driving record is impeccable, with years of experience handling vessels on the water. He also organises diving trips for qualified students where he uses his years of diving experience to emphasise safety when diving, reinforcing confidence in the diving experience for everyone involved. He dives with the postgraduate students throughout the year, always willing to pull on a wet wetsuit and get into the freezing waters of the bay. Rod installed the first flow through water system in the aquarium at VMSC, and he continues to implement and maintain flow-through systems for students when required. He maintains all the laboratory and field equipment, ensuring it is kept in excellent condition.

Rod will often collect biota for students and researchers and assists undergraduate courses at VMSC, where he provides valuable support and guidance in both field and laboratory classes. Rod also works extensively with a range of researchers from a variety of fields, from all the consortium members as well as national and international scientists, providing hands on assistance in both the field and laboratory. It cannot be emphasized enough the commitment that Rod has to supporting the research that is undertaken at VMSC. The time and effort that he invests in research projects, and the knowledge that he passes on to students and researchers alike, has greatly enhanced the research outcomes of the facility and enabled hundreds of students to reach their goals. His dedication, input and hours and hours of hard work have immensely added to the knowledge of Port Phillip Bay and its marine life.

AMSA places great value on its student members and prides itself on its role in helping to bring forth Australia's marine scientists of the future. For those students in Victoria, they are supported in their passion and commitment towards the marine environment by Rod Watson. He is, quite simply, exceptional.