



International Institute for
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

INTERNATIONAL
INSTITUTE FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
STUDIES

IIES NEWSLETTER

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ABOUT US

OUR VISION

The vision of the International Institute for Environmental Studies (IIES) is to become a global leader in advancing research, policy, and collaboration on complex environmental issues.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the IIES is to bring together scientists and policy experts from institutions worldwide to advance collaboration in environmental science, management, and sustainability studies through research, education, and knowledge exchange among its member institutions and partners in government and industry.

Through a variety of annual public events, the Institute aims to facilitate international collaboration on common environmental goals and to convey the outcomes of the research of its members to governmental and industrial partners and to the public at large.

FOUR PILLARS OF THE INSTITUTE

The IIES annual workshops typically focus around four general themes to narrow down the broad topic of the environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The relationships between people and their environment, promotion of human health and well-being, and maintaining healthy and safe communities.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

The commitment of organizations and government to the laws, regulations, and other policy mechanisms concerning environmental issues.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROCESSES

The processes related to the interaction of natural resources with humans and their environment.

GREEN & NOVEL TECHNOLOGY

The technology and science that helps to reduce human impact on the natural environment.





OPENING REMARKS

PROFESSOR HUY DANG, TRENT UNIVERSITY

PROFESSOR MARGARET GRAHAM, UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

2026 brought seasons of extreme environmental conditions across many parts of the world, with heat, drought, low river flows, and wildfires drawing attention to the growing impacts of a changing climate. As environmental pressures become increasingly interconnected with economic and social challenges, the need for research that crosses disciplines, institutions, and national borders continues to grow.

Against this backdrop, the IIES held its 10th Annual Science & Policy Workshop and 9th International Graduate Student Forum in Toulon and on the Île de Porquerolles, France. Centred on the theme Environment, Economy & Society, the events brought together 100 participants from 22 institutions across a dozen countries, including 63 students and postdoctoral researchers. The IIES provided travel awards to 19 students to support their participation. Discussions extended beyond the conference rooms, particularly during the Graduate Student Forum on Porquerolles, where participants explored environmental challenges facing small islands and considered approaches to water and coastal conservation.

In this newsletter, we are pleased to share some of the outcomes of these activities together with several developments across the IIES network. The experiences of Joshua De Sousa, Grace Kadyamadare, and Marcelo Caballero Carrasco offer different perspectives on the value of international research meetings, from presenting research and developing professional networks to encountering new places, disciplines, and ways of thinking. We are also pleased to feature Simone Dahms-Verster from the University of the Witwatersrand in our Researcher Spotlight and share her career path in aquatic health, ecotoxicology, and environmental research.

International collaboration continues in other areas of the IIES network. In September, Professor Huy Dang represented IIES and Trent University in discussions surrounding the State Visit of His Excellency Tô Lâm to Canada and the announcement of the Canada–Viet Nam Strategic Partnership. These exchanges included discussions on climate resilience, critical minerals, research, and talent development, and provided an opportunity to consider how established academic partnerships can contribute to the next phase of cooperation between the two countries. Our Queen Elizabeth Scholars program similarly continues to support international research mobility. In this issue, Trent University PhD candidate Almat Kabyl reflects on his QES experience at National Taiwan University. His account highlights how international research mobility can foster academic growth, cross-cultural learning, and new perspectives to bring back to research in Canada.

As the international community looks towards COP31, this issue also reflects on lessons from COP30 and the continuing challenge of translating scientific knowledge and international commitments into action. This year the arrangements for COP31 are very different: Türkiye will host but Australia will lead the negotiations and the pre-COP meeting was held in the Pacific, bringing very different national priorities into the same process. The emphasis will be on implementation, in order to move from agreed ambition to practical results. In particular, ‘Zero waste and the circular economy’ is a priority COP31 Presidency theme and central pillar of the Climate Action Agenda. Professor Graham will again represent the IIES and the University of Edinburgh at events in Türkiye, including a session on ‘Climate Action and Regional Inclusive Development: Practice, Innovation and Cooperation’ led by Professor Yong Geng, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, in the China Pavilion.

Looking ahead to 2027, the IIES is preparing for its 11th Annual Science & Policy Workshop and 10th International Graduate Student Forum, as well as an online seminar series focused on Tipping Points, which will bring together experts to examine critical thresholds in Earth systems.

We are grateful to our partners, researchers, students, and collaborators for their continued contributions to the IIES. The activities highlighted in this issue reflect the strength of a network built around international exchange, interdisciplinary research, and opportunities for the next generation of researchers. We look forward to continuing these collaborations in 2027.



IIES NEWS

FROM STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP TO SCIENTIFIC ACTION: THE IIES ADVANCES CANADA-VIET NAM COOPERATION

SEPTEMBER 24-25, 2026 | OTTAWA, CANADA

The International Institute for Environmental Studies (IIES) participated in high-level discussions on climate resilience, critical minerals, research, and talent development during the historic State Visit of His Excellency Tô Lâm to Canada.

The September 2026 State Visit of His Excellency Tô Lâm, General Secretary of the Communist Party and President of Viet Nam, marked a significant development in Canada-Viet Nam relations. On September 24, both countries announced a Strategic Partnership, establishing new opportunities for collaboration in science and technology, environmental sustainability, agriculture, education, and people-to-people connections.



Representatives of Trent University, Université Laval and INRS meet with a delegation from Viet Nam's Ministry of Agriculture and Environment and Ho Chi Minh City University of Natural Resources and Environment.

The State Visit provided the IIES with an opportunity to showcase established research partnerships, international mobility initiatives, and scientific expertise, as well as to discuss strategies for translating shared Canada-Viet Nam priorities into meaningful actions.

As Canada and Viet Nam enter a new phase of strategic cooperation, the IIES will continue to facilitate partnership, connect scientific expertise, expand international opportunities for emerging researchers, and foster collaborations that progress from research to application and from bilateral cooperation to regional impact.

[**CONTINUE READING ONLINE**](#)



RESEARCHER SPOTLIGHT

SIMONE DAHMS-VERSTER

SENIOR LECTURER, UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

Simone Dahms-Verster is a senior lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand in addition to serving as a member on the board of the Southern African Society of Aquatic Scientists (SASAgS) and as a Steering Committee member of the Network for Industrially Contaminated Land in Africa (NICOLA). We interviewed Simone to learn more about her career path and her research.

“I have always loved animals and science, so I enrolled for a Bachelor’s degree in Zoology and Environmental Management at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa.”



Dr. Simone Dahms-Verster during her visit to Jagiellonian University in Poland as part of the UNA Europa Africa grant.

“I enjoyed my studies tremendously and subsequently undertook an honours degree in Zoology where we covered more specialised topics. That is where I really fell in love with aquatic environments and the effects of pollution on living beings. After that I was not sure what career path I wanted to follow, so I enrolled for a Masters of Science degree specialising in Aquatic Health where I conducted a research project on heavy metal contamination in a Ramsar accredited wetland in South Africa. During my masters, I encountered concentrations of vanadium in the wetland and couldn't find much information on the effects or safe/unsafe levels of this heavy metal, so for my PhD degree I conducted exposure studies on the African Clawed Frog using vanadium and determined effect in terms of mortality, embryonic development and physiological responses in the organisms.”

“During and after my PhD I worked as an Assistant Lecturer at the University of Johannesburg and thereafter moved to Wits University after my contract ended at UJ.”



Image: Dr. Simone conducting fieldwork in the Limpokwena Nature Reserve in South Africa, pictured in front of a large termite hill.

RESEARCHER SPOTLIGHT

CONTINUED



Dr. Simone Dahms-Verster presenting her work on industrial contamination at EURAC Research in Bolzano, Italy in 2024.

“At Wits University, I was initially employed through the Claude Leon Chair in Water Research, but a couple of years into my contract I was employed permanently as an academic at Wits.”

“I have been at Wits for nearly 5 years now. Wits has a culture of striving for excellence in research, teaching and academic citizenship.”

“What really sets Wits apart is the global exposure it provides, and intensive research support given to staff, especially during the years that you are an early career researcher.”

“I am also privileged to be stationed in the School of Geography, Archaeology and Environmental Studies, where I have incredible mentors who have helped shape me into the academic I am today.

Firstly, Professor Jennifer Fitcheht who has been my School mentor since I started at Wits. She has guided me with such grace through getting established as an academic, she included me as a collaborator, supported me in opportunities and been an excellent role model to me over the last 5 years.

Secondly, Professor Craig Sheridan who supported my research and provided me with opportunities and exposure to various international networks while I was employed through his research chair.

Finally, my Head of School Professor Paida Mhangara, who trusted in me enough to give me significant responsibilities in the School as soon as I arrived, and supported me every step of the way in making a success of them. I am deeply grateful to you all.”

“Be open to all opportunities that may come your way. Don't be scared to speak to more established researchers in your field, they are very happy to speak to students and early career researchers, I promise. And most importantly, be kind, always. Human relationships are invaluable in this field.”

[CONTINUE READING ONLINE](#)



TOULON 2026

10TH ANNUAL SCIENCE & POLICY WORKSHOP

JUNE 14-17, 2026 | TOULON, FRANCE

Co-hosted by the IIES and the Université de Toulon, the 10th Annual Science & Policy Workshop took place in Toulon (France) from June 14-17, 2026, followed by the 9th International Graduate Student Forum on the island of Porquerolles (France) from June 18-20, 2026. This year's events brought together delegates from across the IIES network and beyond to share research centered around the main theme of this year's Workshop: "Environment, Economy & Society".

With support from the Métropole Toulon Provence Méditerranée, the IIES and the University of Toulon welcomed 100 participants from 22 institutions across a dozen countries. The participants included 63 students and post-docs, and 37 professors, staff, and professionals from the policy and industry sectors.

Aligned with its mission to address barriers in science, the IIES awarded 19 students travel awards to support their participation in this year's events.



Group photo of the participants at the 10TH Annual IIES Science & policy Workshop at the University of Toulon's Porte D'Italie campus in Toulon (France), 2026.

Attendees were invited to connect ahead of the workshop through an informal icebreaker event held at the harbourfront the evening before sessions began. By encouraging informal conversations among attendees, the gathering fostered a sense of community and strengthened the collaborative dynamic of the event.

The first 2 days of the workshop featured poster presentations and talks from a variety of fields, with topics related to the central theme of "Environment, Economy & Society". The Science & Policy Workshops aim to promote interdisciplinary approaches to environmental challenges by providing researchers and policymakers with a platform to share their work with specialists from STEM and the social sciences alike. The final day concluded with a Gala dinner at one of the region's many beautiful vineyards.



Image: Participants listening to a talk at the 10th Annual Science & Policy Workshop at the University of Toulon.

CONTINUED TOULON 2026

9TH INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT FORUM

**JUNE 18-20, 2026 | ILE DE PORQUEROLLES,
FRANCE**

Many of the workshop attendees also continued on to participate in the 9th International Graduate Student Forum, at L'institution de gestion sociale des armées (IGESA) on the Ile de Porquerolles, France. There, participants engaged in networking and professional development sessions and had the opportunity to explore the island and learn about Sustainable Island initiatives and labelling. The Forum started off with students splitting into smaller groups to participate in a speed-introduction session and a public speaking workshop.



Groups of students at the 9th IIES Graduate Forum partaking in a game highlighting the environmental challenges faced by small islands and brainstorming sustainable solutions.



Students on a guided walking tour highlighting the island of Porquerolle's water conservation efforts.

The following day started with panel talks about starting a career in academia presented by professor Mary-Claire Buell and professor Jun-Ray Macairan from Trent University. The rest of the day was dedicated to a learning activity led by SMILO – Small Islands Organisation which presented the various environmental challenges faced by small islands. Students took part in a game wherein they played the part of stakeholders on a fictional island looking for solutions to a number of sustainability issues faced by small islands and planning the steps needed to apply for a Small Island Sustainability Label.

In the afternoon, students went on a guided walking tour of the Porquerolles island led by the parc rangers of the National Park of Port-Cros & Porquerolles. This tour highlighted the many environmental challenges faced by the island of Porquerolles, particularly in terms of coastal and water conservation. At the end of these two and a half days, students left the island having built stronger bonds, learned new skills and developed a fresh perspective on sustainable development.

[**CONTINUE READING ONLINE**](#)



STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

IIES WORKSHOP & FORUM

JOSHUA DE SOUSA

MASTER'S STUDENT,
TRENT UNIVERSITY

"In June 2026, I had the opportunity to participate in the 10th Annual Science & Policy Workshop and 9th International Graduate Student Forum, hosted by the IIES and the University of Toulon in France. As a Master's student in Materials Science at Trent University, I attended the workshop to present my poster, *The Development of Fluorescent Carbon Dots for the Detection of Metal Contaminants*."

"Before the conference, I seriously considered not attending because I was nervous about travelling internationally by myself for the first time. If there is one lesson I will carry forward from this experience, it is simple: take risks."

"One of the most rewarding aspects of presenting my research was the overwhelmingly positive feedback and genuine interest from attendees."



Joshua travelling from Toulon to Île de Porquerolles aboard the ferry for the Graduate Student Forum.

"Those conversations provided valuable perspectives and reinforced the potential impact of my work."

"As someone who often questions whether research is making an impact, hearing that was both reassuring and motivating. It reminded me that scientific research is not only about generating data, but also about effectively communicating ideas and inspiring curiosity in others."

"I arrived knowing almost no one and left with lifelong memories, countless new friendships, a multitude of professional connections, and a renewed motivation to pursue research that can contribute to solving global environmental challenges. For that, I am profoundly grateful."

[CONTINUE READING ONLINE](#)



Image: Josh (second from the right) exploring Mont Faron with fellow participants and enjoying panoramic views overlooking Toulon and the Mediterranean coastline.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

IIES WORKSHOP & FORUM

GRACE KADYAMADARE

**PHD CANDIDATE,
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG**



Grace at the top of Mount Faron in Toulon (France) for the 10th Annual IIES Science & Policy Workshop.

“Research has a remarkable way of opening doors you never knew existed.”

“France has always been one of the countries I dreamed of visiting. When I received news that the 10th Annual IIES Science & Policy Workshop would be held in Toulon in France, I knew I had to seize the opportunity to attend. As a PhD geographer and emerging early-career researcher, I enjoyed the journey from Johannesburg through Doha and Nice to Toulon, looking forward to the week’s enticing schedule.”

“As Doreen Massey states, place is continually created through social interactions, migration, and economic change; this conference created a space to reconnect with new and former colleagues. ”

“Standing before a diverse audience of students, professors, and researchers, I presented some of my research findings titled “Reconceptualising illegal waste dumping in the ‘dump that calls’ representational spaces in the Mbekweni Township, Paarl”. My presentation challenged the conventional framing of waste deposited outside formally designated collection systems as simply illegal dumping.”

“My IIES experience demonstrated that some of the most meaningful learning happens when scientific conversations extend beyond the conference room and into the places and environments we encounter and explore. From engaging with sustainability and climate change to developing communication skills and exploring Toulon and Porquerolles firsthand, the trip strengthened my appreciation of the connection between research, people and place.. I left France inspired to continue these conversations, build new collaborations, and contribute to research that can help shape a more sustainable future.”

[**CONTINUE READING ONLINE**](#)



Image: Grace watching the sunset at the 9th Graduate Student Forum on the Ile de Porquerolles in France.



STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

IIES WORKSHOP & FORUM

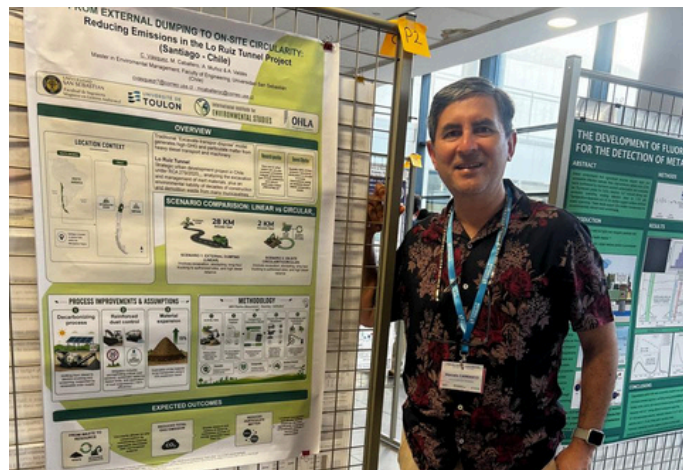
MARCELO CABALLERO CARRASCO

MASTER'S STUDENT,
UNIVERSIDAD SAN SEBASTIÁN

"At more than 50 years old, attending the 2026 IIES Science & Policy Workshop & Graduate Student Forum at the Université de Toulon was my first time at an international event of this kind."

"I arrived with curiosity, some nerves and many expectations, and I left with something I didn't expect: renewed hope."

"What struck me most was seeing so many students and young people truly committed to environmental issues. Their energy, their questions and their ideas showed me that the future of our planet is in good hands. For someone of my generation, that is very encouraging."



Marcelo Caballero Carrasco pictured in front of his poster during the poster session.

"I believe networks like the IIES are very valuable. They help bring knowledge together across countries and disciplines, and I hope they also lead to real cooperation between institutions, professionals and students."

"I have to admit that my English is limited, and I didn't catch every detail of every presentation. Even so, I understood the core messages of the forum, and the warmth and openness of the participants made me feel welcome. Language was not a barrier to sharing a common purpose."

"I am grateful to the IIES, the Université de Toulon and Universidad San Sebastián for making this experience possible."

"To anyone who thinks it is too late to start: it isn't. I would encourage every student, whatever their age, to take part."

[CONTINUE READING ONLINE](#)



Image: Marcelo (second from the right) standing in front of the University of Toulon entrance with fellow attendees.

QUEEN ELIZABETH SCHOLARS (QES) PROGRAM

The Trent-IIES Canadian Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Scholarship provides full funding for graduate student mobility, allowing scholars to work on environmental research projects at eligible institutions abroad.

This program aims to improve global talent exchange and cross-cultural collaboration between Canada and other nations as well as foster a new generation of leaders. Over four years (2025-2028), the IIES will award 24 scholarships valued at up to \$13,000 to students to support their travel abroad for internships on environmental research projects, as part of our *United Global Plan of Action for One Health and One Climate* initiative. Of these 24 scholarships, 16 will be granted to Canadian students to work abroad for at least 2 months. The remaining 8 scholarships will be awarded to international students who wish to work at Trent University.

This prestigious award is open to eligible graduate students from a variety of disciplines (including, but not limited to, STEM, humanities and economics) whose research aligns with the scope of the project presented on our website.



QES Alum, Scott Stebbing (Right), at the Can Gio mangrove forest park in Viet Nam with host lab members Phu Tran and Dung Nguyen, and Dung's accompanying family members.

Faculty members from eligible institutions who wish to host a fully funded student are invited to submit their proposed research projects on our website.

Students who wish to become QEScholars are encouraged to submit their applications on our website, where several research projects are already available. Eligibility information and program requirements are also outlined on our website.

Alternatively, students can prepare their own project proposal and seek out potential host supervisors at the eligible institution of their choosing.

Visit our website to learn more about the Trent-IIES QES program and to apply to become a QEScholar or a project host:

APPLY TODAY!



**Universities
Canada.**



**Fondation
Rideau Hall
Foundation**

**QUEEN
ELIZABETH
Scholars**

TRENT
UNIVERSITY



STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

QES SCHOLAR

ALMAT KABYL

PHD STUDENT,
TRENT UNIVERSITY

"I am a Queen Elizabeth II Scholars (QES) program alumnus and a PhD Candidate in Environmental and Life Sciences at Trent University. My research focuses on critical minerals and nutrients from ashes, with an emphasis on risk assessment and predictive machine learning for a circular economy. I am particularly interested in assessing the environmental risks of using ash as an agricultural amendment and using machine learning to predict the leaching behaviour of ash-amended soils. As part of my QES research project at National Taiwan University (NTU), I worked on Material Flow Analysis of ash for soil amendment."

"Having lived, studied, and travelled in different places, I have always valued opportunities to learn from different cultures and ways of thinking."



Almat Kabyl, a PhD candidate from Trent University and a 2026 recipient of the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship.

"I saw QES as an opportunity to build on those experiences while developing myself as a researcher, meeting people from different academic and cultural backgrounds, and gaining perspectives that I could bring back to my research in Canada."

"If I could give one piece of advice to students who are thinking about applying to the QES program, I would simply say: do not hesitate, apply."

"I had my own expectations and uncertainties before going to Taiwan. But the experience taught me that some of the most valuable opportunities come from being open to new academic, cultural, and personal experiences."

[CONTINUE READING ONLINE](#)



Image: Almat (right) volunteering with children at Chengcheng School in Nantou County (Taiwan).

IIES NOTICE BOARD

4TH EDITION OF THE SYMPOSIUM ON TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH FOR A HEALTHY PLANET

REIMS, FRANCE • DECEMBER 3 – 4, 2026

The University of Reims Champagne-Ardenne and the EXEBIO Institute have announced the 4th edition of the Symposium Transdisciplinary Research for a Healthy Planet. This year's main theme asks: "How can we preserve ecosystems?"



[REGISTER NOW](#)

REFLECTIONS ON COP30 AND A LOOK TOWARDS COP31

EDINBURGH EARTH INITIATIVE

Last November, IIES Co-director Margaret Graham represented the IIES and the University of Edinburgh at the 2025 United Nations Climate Change Conference, known as the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) at the Hangar Convention Centre in Belem, Brazil.

Months later, Earth Fellow and PhD student Katherine Taylor, brings together insightful and candid reflections on the COP30 negotiations in Belem, Brazil from academic staff and Earth Fellows and looks ahead towards COP31 in Antalya, Türkiye.

[REGISTER NOW](#)

[READ THE FULL REPORT](#)



UPCOMING EVENTS

2026-2027



Students taking part in a walking tour highlighting the island of Porquerolle's water conservation efforts at the 2026 Graduate Student Forum in France.

QUEEN ELIZABETH SCHOLARS PROGRAM

| UNTIL DECEMBER 2028

The IIES is still accepting applications for our Queen Elizabeth Scholars program. Both Canadian and International eligible students can apply online to become scholars. We are also accepting new projects from project hosts.

Apply now or learn more [on our website](#).

ONLINE SEMINAR SERIES

ONLINE | WINTER 2027

The IIES is hosting an online seminar series centered around the theme: Tipping Points. This series will feature lectures from subject matter experts from around the globe discussing the various key thresholds of our Earth systems.

Our future online lecture series is still in planning. Please keep checking our website for updates. All previous IIES lecture series are available for free on our YouTube Channel: [@IIEScom](#).

11TH ANNUAL SCIENCE & POLICY WORKSHOP & 10TH INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT FORUM

LOCATION TBD | 2027

Planning for the 11th Annual IIES Workshop on Science & Policy and 10th International Graduate Student Forum is underway!

Image: Trent University campus in Peterborough, Ontario.



GET MORE INFORMATION

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**Thank you for your interest in the International Institute for
Environmental Studies. We look forward to collaborating with you.**

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