

## POST GRADUATES - ILWS SCHOLARSHIPS

### Abbie Spiers



ILWS PhD scholarship recipient Abbie Spiers, 38, is an Australian now living in Wellington, New Zealand, with her husband and four young children.

Abbie began her PhD in July 2011, with supervisors Prof Max Finlayson and Dr Rosy Black. Her broad topic is "Ecosystems health – the perception and the reality". "I'm interested in looking at this in New Zealand but may have some case studies in Australia or an interest in applying it to Australia later," says Abbie who is doing her PhD by distance. That's something that doesn't faze her as almost all of her education has been by distance.

With a father a park ranger, Abbie grew up in national parks in South Australia before the family moved to Kakadu National Park in 1986. Her first job, over the school holidays, was with the Office of the Supervising Scientist's Biological Monitoring Laboratory in Kakadu which she continued to work for, for a further five years. During that time she did her Biology Degree part-time completing it with a year full-time at what is now Charles Darwin University.

While working at the lab, she met Max who soon had

her helping on research projects for the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientists (ERISS). Her tasks included coordinating a global review of wetland resources; coordinating study tours for wetland managers from Vietnam, and for Aboriginal communities; helping with a fish monitoring program in Papua New Guinea; and organising the Australian Society for Limnology Conference in Darwin in 2000.

With the birth of her first child Abbie retrained as a mediator and worked for five years as a consultant NT WorkSafe mediator. During that period she had three more children and did a Grad. Dip in Professional Communications, majoring in public relations. In 2008 the family moved to New Zealand. In October 2010 Abbie again worked Max reviewing Inter-governmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) publications pertinent to wetlands in Australia, New Zealand, and Small Islands, and reviewing information for a vulnerability assessment of Sydney Olympic Park.

"In the middle of all that the application for the ILWS scholarship came up," says Abbie. "I hadn't thought of doing a PhD now; it was something I thought I would do when I was 50 when the kids were older, but then I thought it might be good timing because my little fella starts school in 2012."

Abbie says one of the reasons she chose her topic was "as an Australian going to New Zealand, you have an impression of New Zealand linked to the 'pure' New Zealand that they market quite strongly. When I got to New Zealand and spent some time there I was very surprised at the difference between the reality and what my perception had been, and I'm interested in whether or not that is other people's experience in NZ."

Abbie's research project will integrate ecological science with social science. "I'm also interested in how science is communicated," she says. "The ILWS scholarship appealed to me because it was for integrated research, integrating different disciplines."

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