

Brett Pickering

Marine Technician 3

Marine Sciences: SIO Directors Office

The day before Halloween this past year, we were floating off the California Coast on the flagship Research Vessel Sally Ride, and things were not going well. We were there for a major Office of Naval Research funded basic science experiment to study the intricate physical dance that plays out just offshore between tides, waves, currents, winds, and increasingly, the local ramifications of global climate signals. To detangle the complex and often nonlinear dynamics, we (scientists from UCSD, several collaborating universities, and two Navy research labs) had previously installed well over a hundred so-called 'moorings' in September, with a line stretched taut between a sea floor anchor and near-surface buoy that was densely populated with cutting-edge scientific instrumentation. We were there in late October to pull them all up, plug in, and let them share the secrets of what they had seen, secrets that will help us better understand the ocean in our backyard, steward its ecosystems and manage fisheries well.

As oceanographers, we know too well the capricious nature of the ocean, and a recent severe autumn storm had tangled the mooring line on itself in a complex jumble that was hampering our recovery efforts. Time after time we attempted to pull the recalcitrant beasts aboard, only to have the tangle-compromised line snap under tension, losing us not only the instruments and data, but creating a safety concern for the scientists, crew and students aboard. Unwilling to continue in this unproductive vein, we placed an emergency call back to San Diego for help. Brett Pickering and his colleagues hitched up their small boat to a trailer and set out at 3 am the next morning to drive towards Pismo Beach to assist. Instead of spending Halloween with his own young children, he spent the next several days working hour after hour to help us, from well before sunrise to after sunset. He piloted the small boat to survey for our lost gear and support scientific divers who manually detangled our instruments, cut line, and brought almost everything back aboard safely. His cheerfulness, professionalism, and steady competence played no small role in the final success of our multi-million-dollar expedition, for which we were able to repay him only with a few pieces of Halloween candy and our deep gratitude.

The more I've asked around, stories like this are not the exception but the norm for him. Professor Falk Feddersen had a similar experience: "our success with the experiment could not have occurred without Brett's tireless dedication to making sure our instruments got deployed and recovered with the safety of both our field crew and instruments in mind. The days were very long... The conditions were also often quite challenging... During all of this, he maintained good cheer and devotion to his task." Brett's experience and insight often lead him to work very closely with research groups; Scripps engineer Luc Leinan notes "His expertise and broad knowledge were critical, suggesting improvements to our proposed wave glider deployment and recovery to ensure mission success and safety of operations. During this time he always made himself available to fit our sometimes strenuous field work schedule that included weekends and extra long hours."

Beyond his direct contribution to fieldwork programs Brett also spends considerable time training those around him, and working directly with students and post-docs. Researcher Dale Stokes comments "Brett Pickering has quickly proven to be an invaluable resource for scientists and students at SIO. He has overseen the development and implementation of the UCSD/SIO small boat training program which is an essential class ensuring the safety and ongoing education of our users locally and much further afield. His work ethic is tireless, professional and his attitude exemplary." SIO Postdoc Jenny Hofmeister offers a quintessential summary, "He didn't know me, he only briefly knew my research, and yet he eagerly offered any and all resources he had to ensure I was successful in my research endeavors. This is Brett in a nutshell. He has gone above and beyond his job description to help me, and others, successfully meet our science needs. Research institutions like SIO need staff like Brett, and he deserves recognition for his outstanding contribution to the UCSD community."