

Marine & Freshwater Research

For Referees

General Information

Referees deserve immense praise and appreciation because they are undertaking an exacting task on a voluntary basis. We are very grateful for their time and efforts in doing constructive reviews. Our journal's quality depends heavily on the high quality of its peer reviews, and referees play a fundamental and usually anonymous role in the refinement and communication of our science.

Respectful of the rights of authors and our obligations to our readers, we trust referees will be prompt, courteous and fair, treating the manuscript, review and recommendation as confidential. We ask that reviews for the Journal be completed within 3-4 weeks of the acceptance to review. However, we also understand that unexpected delays can occur and we ask that if an extension of time is needed, the referee contact the Editor or relevant Associate Editor immediately.

Referees are listed each year in the Annual Referee Index without any indication of the paper that they have reviewed (although reviewers can be excluded from this list if they wish). The Journal takes this opportunity to publicly acknowledge the vital contribution that referees make, and the debt owed by authors and the Editorial Board.

Referee Guidelines

Scope and relevance

Marine & Freshwater Research publishes original and significant papers on aquatic science, and its Scope spans research done in all aquatic habitats and ecosystems from groundwaters and wetlands through to estuaries, coral reefs and the open ocean. Studies that are globally relevant, address broad conceptual questions and that have significant applications to management and conservation are especially welcomed. Each year, the Journal receives many more manuscripts than can be published (while maintaining rapid publication times) so the policy is to select the most important papers with the greatest significance to the wider scientific community.

Although specialist papers at the forefront of a particular field are encouraged, they must **explicitly identify their broader relevance and implications for the field**. Papers reporting preliminary or incremental results that do not have sufficient originality, studies that are solely descriptive or taxonomic, and research that is simply another example or case study of a well-known phenomenon should not be recommended for acceptance. For papers reporting experiments with humans or animals, referees are asked to please comment on the procedures if they appear to conflict with established codes of practice or ethics or if insufficient information is given to judge this.

Structure of a review

A good review is succinct, well-organised, constructive, and diplomatic. It says what is interesting and significant about a paper, how the paper might be improved and, if the paper is not publishable, why the flaws are fatal. In comments to the author, the review must make no explicit statement about the acceptability of the paper for publication – reserve this comment for confidential comments to the Editor or Associate Editor.

Reviews for *Marine & Freshwater Research* consist of two sections:

- (1) Comments to the Author(s), comprising 'General comments', 'Specific comments' and some multiple-choice questions to aid consistency across reviews, and
- (2) Confidential comments to the Editor, comprising candid, frank and honest assessments of the quality of the science and the style of the communication. These latter comments will not be released to the author.

It is recommended that the text for the 'Comments to Author' and the 'Confidential comments to the Editor' are prepared on a word processor beforehand so that they can be copied and pasted into **OSPREY** when you submit your review (see How to Submit a Review).

General comments to author. In this section, please identify the major contributions and strengths of the paper. Then, assess where there are weaknesses in design and analysis that are likely to affect the paper's suitability for publication. **Emphasise the most significant points**, phrasing them in such a way that they help the author revise and amend the paper if feasible. Some flaws in design are fatal (e.g. inadequate sample size, inappropriate scale of replication, sampling or experimentation, unsuitable methods) and these should be clearly identified as such. It is very helpful if comments are numbered as this makes it easier for specific reference to them by the author and Editor or Associate Editor.

Negative criticism, no matter how justified, is hard for an author to accept, and we ask that referees criticise the science, not the scientist. Harsh words may cause the author (and members of the Editorial Board) to doubt the referee's objectivity and perhaps discount the comments. Although an opinion expressed by an author may differ from that held by a referee, it should be left to stand if justified by material presented in the paper.

General comments should address the following points:

- Relevance to journal's scope and importance to readers
- Soundness of the science (e.g. appropriate scientific approach, sampling method, experimental or survey design, statistical analysis)
- Originality
- Degree to which data support the conclusions
- Organization, writing style and clarity of presentation
- Length relative to information content

Specific comments to author. Specific comments must give evidence to support positive or negative general comments. The following pointers may be useful in preparing this section of the review:

- **Presentation:** Is the paper's story cohesive and tightly-reasoned throughout? If not, where does the text deviate from the central argument? Do the title, abstract, additional keywords, introduction, results and discussion accurately and consistently reflect the major point(s) of the paper? Is the writing concise, readable, and easy to follow? Is there any excessive speculation? Is the English expression clear and unambiguous throughout?
- **Justification and implications:** Do the Abstract and Introduction clearly identify the relevance and context of the work immediately? Are the implications of the findings

specifically explained? Where relevant, are there clearly framed hypotheses and predictions? Are these adequately addressed in the results and discussion? Are caveats or limitations to the study clearly explained and compensated for?

- **Length:** What parts of the paper should be expanded, condensed or combined? Give specific advice (rather than saying “shorten the Introduction by 20%”, for example). Instead of correcting the whole paper if too long, giving a sample paragraph of condensed text may be helpful to verbose authors. Over-use of references is another common problem – more than 2-3 references to support a claim is usually too many, and authors should be encouraged to focus on only the key papers in the field.
- **Methods:** Are the methods appropriate, current and described clearly enough that some-one else could repeat the work? Is the study design fully explained? Is there adequate replication at appropriate levels? Are the statistical analyses appropriate and correctly applied? Are significance statements fully justified with reference to the test statistic, its degrees of freedom and its probability level? Does the paper follow the Guidelines for data analysis and presentation?
- **Data presentation:** Can all results be readily verified with reference to tables, figures or statistical information? Are all tables and figures necessary, readily interpretable and fully labeled?
- **Errors and reference citations:** Point out errors in techniques, facts, calculations or interpretations? Deviations from Journal style may also attract comment. Are only relevant references cited? Are these provided for all assertions of fact not supported by data in this paper? Does this paper present data or conclusions that are already published or in press? If so, please provide details.

You may sign the review if you wish. Unless you indicate otherwise, we shall assume you wish to remain anonymous. Each year, we publish a full list of referees (but not the papers they reviewed) from the preceding year’s submissions (Annual Referee Index) to publicly acknowledge their contribution to the Journal’s quality. If you do not wish to be on the list, please indicate this on your review.

Checklist for consistency across reviews. To help provide consistency across reviews, OSPREY will ask you to answer the following questions. These answers are not conveyed directly to the author.

1. Do the title and abstract clearly indicate the content of the paper?

Yes/No

2. Does the Introduction explicitly state the aims/hypotheses of the work and why it was done?

Yes/No

3. Are the methods valid and is there enough information that the study could be repeated by someone else?

Yes/No

4. Are all results fully justified using appropriate statistics, tables or figures?

Yes/No

5. Are the findings explicitly put in context with the literature to demonstrate their relevance to aquatic science?

Yes/No

6. How do you rate the quality of the science?

Experimentally and/or theoretically excellent, with no flaws/Competent, with no major flaws/Mostly competent, but with some flaws that can be remedied/Weak, with major flaws or inconsistencies/Very

weak, with fatal flaws requiring further data collection

7. How do you rate the originality of the work?

Highly novel/Some novel aspects/Essentially routine

8. How do you rate the importance of this paper to aquatic science?

Research of major significance on topic of central importance/Important research on topic of broad significance/Useful research on topic that lacks originality/Research on topic of limited significance

9. Have appropriate ethical and animal welfare standards been observed in this study?

Yes/No/Not possible to tell, more detail required/Not relevant

10. What is your recommendation for this manuscript?

Accept without alteration/Reconsider after minor revision/Reconsider after major revision, not requiring further referee assessment/Review again after major revision/Submit for publication in a more specialised journal/Reject

11. If you recommended the paper be reviewed again, would you be willing to review the revision?

Yes/No

12. Do you wish to remain anonymous?

Yes/No

Confidential comments to Editor. Often, the referee wishes to express their concerns about problems in a paper in a diplomatic way in their comments to the authors, and this is strongly encouraged. However, comments to the Editor or Associate Editor can be more direct because these comments will not be released to the author. An example might be:

'This is an interesting topic fitting the scope of the Journal but because the authors have pooled their six sets of samples across three reefs without justification and considered this as 18 replicates, we seem to have within reef and among reef variation confounded. Given the marginal significance of the ANOVA on these pseudoreplicated data, I find the conclusions suspect. I also cannot figure out how they determined their SE bars on Fig. 4 (is it based on $n=18$ or does $n=3$ reefs and they averaged the 6 samples per reef?). There are no hypotheses in the Introduction and the Discussion section rambles badly on lines 233-384. Most of the isopod generic names are spelled wrongly in Table 2. Finally, 19 of the 40 references are incorrectly cited – to me, this seems a bit sloppy.

These flaws do not seem fatal and I think the authors should be encouraged to revise their manuscript. I would be happy to look over it again to check the isopod names and the revised statistics.'

Potential conflicts of interest can also be mentioned in these confidential comments. Of course, if the conflict is severe, the referee should contact the relevant Associate Editor or Editor before undertaking the review to discuss the situation. If unsure, contact the Editor first.

How to Submit a Review

When you are invited to review a manuscript, you will be contacted via email and asked to log into the online journal management system **OSPREY**. You can accept this invitation to review and download the paper after logging into Osprey and entering your username and password.

Accepting to review

Once logged in, click on 'Reviewer (1 tasks)' on the left, then click on 'Invitation to Review'. Click on 'View Manuscript File(s)' to access the manuscript file for printing or downloading (do this before clicking 'Accept' and 'Submit'). Open the manuscript by clicking on 'manuscript.pdf'. Then you can save it to your computer from the **open** file.

If you find that 'Invitation to Review' has changed to 'Submit Review', this is not a problem. You can retrieve the manuscript by clicking on 'Submit Review', then on 'View Manuscript File(s)', and finally on 'manuscript.pdf'.

To **accept to review** this manuscript, close the window where you found 'manuscript.pdf', click on the 'Accept' button, and then click 'Submit'. The screen will refresh automatically and display 'Submit Review' to complete the task. If you do not wish to complete it at this time, you can log out by clicking on 'Save and submit later'.

To **decline to review**, you can do this either on the website or by emailing the Associate Editor or Editor directly. It is greatly appreciated if you can recommend alternative referees, please.

If you have questions or problems, contact publishing.mfr@csiro.au

Submitting the review

Most referees prefer to print out the manuscript, read it and consider the contents, and then prepare their comments to authors and editors using their word processor (see Referee Guidelines).

To submit your review, log in again and click on 'Reviewer (1 tasks)' and then on 'Submit Review'. ('Invitation to Review' changes to 'Submit Review' once you agree to review the paper.) Please answer the general tick-box questions, then submit your full comments in the panels provided. We recommend that you paste your comments into the relevant sections (Comments to the Author and Confidential Comments) from your Word document. You can upload a marked copy of the manuscript along with your review.

Note that the system responds to lack of activity and you will be logged out after an hour so anything you've entered will not be saved. If you need to stop during submission of your review, be sure to click on 'Save and Complete Later'. You will then be able to log in again later, click on 'Submit Review' as above and continue to upload your comments. If you encounter problems at any stage of the process, or prefer to send your review by email or regular mail, you can send it to the Associate Editor or Editor directly.