

Marine Ecologists Explore Science- Journal Issues

six journals. Inter-Research boasts that it “employs more staff and invests more effort and money for evaluating, selecting and improving submitted manuscripts than most other publishers—commercial, institutional or society based”. Otto Kinne, a German zoologist, founded Inter-Research in 1979, and MEPS was its first journal, also started in 1979.

Originally, MEPS, a peer-reviewed journal, had a “comments section”. In 1995, it was transformed into a theme section, which contains “integrated multiauthor analyses and syntheses that highlight cutting-edge research areas or problems” identified by contributing editors. Five theme sections have focused on science-publishing issues. A sixth, “Peer Review of Journal Articles Versus Research Proposals—What Is the Difference?” was pending as of the middle of 2004. The commentaries contain many familiar ideas but also some new perspectives (see below). Theme sections are available in their entirety on the Web (www.int-res.com/journals/meps/themeSections.html). The theme sections of interest to science editors are described below with annotation.

Browman HI, coordinator. Quality in science publishing? MEPS 2004;270:265-87.

The contributors are mostly MEPS contributing editors but also include three North Americans: two editors and one publishing executive. The consensus is that quality depends on good writing or, when that fails, good editing and good scientific judgment in selecting papers. The difficulty of ensuring the latter is reflected in the title of one of the commentaries: “Between the Scylla of Hidebound Conservatism and the Charybdis of Mindless Speculation”. A suggestion for negotiating these dangerous waters is using the “subject editor plus editor-in-chief” model.

Riisgård HU, idea and coordination. Misuse of the peer-review system: time for countermeasures? MEPS 2003;258:297-309.

At the time this was done, Inter-Research had just modified its guidelines to require

that “if a manuscript has previously been submitted to any other publication outlet, the former reviews and author’s replies should be enclosed”. The reactions of the 28 contributors, mainly editors of marine-science journals, were—predictably—mixed.

Giere O, idea and coordination. Who needs symposium proceedings? MEPS 2001;211:305-9.

The six contributors each hail from a different European country. Giere starts this theme section with some compelling, convincing, and uncompromising arguments on why symposium proceedings are a bad idea.

Riisgård HU, idea and coordination. The peer-review system: time for re-assessment? MEPS 2000;192:305-13.

The 20 contributors, editors from different marine-science journals, generally agree that there should be a “price” for submitting manuscripts; for example, authors should serve as reviewers for journals that publish their papers.

Browman HI, idea and coordination. Negative results. MEPS 1999;191:301-9.

One Welsh marine scientist and five North American philosophers contributed. Stephen Jay Gould was invited but declined, having written an essay on this topic in 1993. The theme section, however, contains a long paragraph of quotations from that essay, most notably, “In my opinion, [the presence of negative results] is perhaps the most important effectively undiscussed subject in the entire methodology of science.”

In addition to the theme sections, MEPS has a discussion forum intended to focus on current top issues. Only two issues are posted, both editing-related, but very little “discussion” is occurring—perhaps because the theme sections are so successful.

“Quality in Science Publishing” is the most recent of several “theme sections” of *Marine Ecology Progress Series (MEPS)* of interest to science editors. This particular theme section was brought to our attention by Howard I Browman, a newcomer to CSE and a contributing editor to MEPS. MEPS is published by Inter-Research, a self-sustaining international science center in Germany that publishes books and