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Baseline now has abstracts and keywords

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Editorial

Baseline now has abstracts and keywords

Baseline has been an integral part of *Marine Pollution Bulletin* for almost 20 years. During this period, there have been no radical changes in its format (although, in my 9-year tenure as Baseline's editor, I have encouraged a greater variety of content). Baseline's overall aims have not changed, in that it continues to publish articles on contaminants in marine ecosystems, especially those from areas of the world where little information is available, as well as papers of an ecotoxicological or ecological nature which lay baseline data in localities which may be of interest in the future.

Baseline papers are distinguished from the Reports in our journal by their short note format – i.e., the lack of sections and subsections, and by the lack (at least up until now) of abstracts and keywords. I must admit that I do quite like the brevity and the lack of sections (Baseline's single clearly distinguishable features, which will continue), as these encourage authors to focus their thoughts, and produce more concise manuscripts. Of late, however, my major concern has been the lack of an abstract. Because of this, I am increasingly coming to the belief that some excellent Baseline papers may potentially be ignored, as readers cannot get a “feel” for the content *via* a quick glance at the abstract either by reading a hard copy of the journal, or most importantly in our digital age, being able to look at abstracts online.

My thoughts were solidified when I was recently asked by an author contributing to Baseline, whose paper had been accepted subject to revision, whether space limitations were the primary reason that there were no abstracts in Baseline papers. This author routinely reads Baseline papers, and has published in what he described as “this excellent outlet” in the past. He went on to say that, depending on the subject matter, it would seem that some papers would benefit from an abstract, as this format is standard for “Short Communications” in many other journals.

This prompted me to some investigations. Firstly, what proportion of *Marine Pollution Bulletin's* contributions is made up by Baseline articles? A quick trawl through the journal's 2009 online editions (January to October at the time of writing) revealed some 38 Baseline articles, representing 19% of the journal's regular scientific contributions (excluding special issues, editorials and the “News” section). That's obviously significant. I then utilised the “Scopus[®]” website, to try and determine whether articles in *Marine Pollution Bulletin* had similar citation statistics to other related journals. This information provided an interesting insight. *Marine Pollution Bulletin* has an Impact Factor which is well up in the top quartile for its subject areas of classification (2.562 this year, with a 5-year Impact Factor of 2.979). Our journal's “% Not Cited” papers are broadly comparable with similar environmental journals (which, it should be noted, do not exclusively publish material on marine science). My question during this analysis, however, was “Does Baseline's lack of abstracts alter our ability to expose

readers to the good material in Baselines?” As the Scopus[®] tool is unable to separate such statistics for our journal's “Reports” and “Baselines”, the answer, I have to confess, is only “maybe”.

Environmental science, by its very nature, is a “slow burn” area of expertise, in that it takes 2–3 years for the majority of papers to be cited in the literature. Now, all journals have articles that are not cited, but given that Abstracting services offer an abstract as the first (and financially important to many readers) free entry point to an article, could the lack of an abstract detract from the clearly high importance of papers in this category? I do think that Baseline's lack of an abstract and keywords may be contributing factors to my thesis that such articles may not be as accessible as they could be.

My correspondence with the Baseline author I mentioned earlier helped me to confirm this. When I wrote to him regarding my theories, he replied saying that “I think you have hit upon a key point regarding the abstracts – one that I have heard from other *Marine Pollution Bulletin* readers. The lack of abstracts may reduce the transfer of key information and restrict the use and applicability of these articles. This is true from an online perspective (where there is no true information available aside from the title of the paper for some readers). But more importantly, as you mentioned, there is potential for critical information to get lost or ignored. This is especially true for readers that are on the ‘fringes’ of marine science, but who use *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (e.g., human health professionals) in their daily work”.

In early September, I took this notion another step forward, by chatting with Charles Sheppard (*Marine Pollution Bulletin's* editor in chief) and Christiane Barranguet, the publishing editor at Elsevier. They have agreed with my suggestions and so, as recent online contributors will have noticed, we have reset our submission website (with the inestimable help of Elsevier's Emma Pendle) to include abstracts and keywords for Baseline submissions. The Baseline papers in this edition of *Marine Pollution Bulletin* are the first to contain this information.

On a final note, the good news from all of this is that we “fight above our weight”, as the vast majority of our papers *are* read, and *are* cited by our colleagues. We think of high Impact Factor journals as being “gods”, and that all their papers are relevant to the scientific community. If subsequent citations reflect this, then we do extremely well in comparison to journals such as *Environmental Science and Technology* (one of the higher Impact Factor journals in our area, but with a similar “Not Cited” percentage to our own journal) and even that doyen of the scientific community, *Nature*, which has an average “Not Cited” percentage of 30.9% (Fig. 1). In case there are any trans-Atlantic murmurings about this, *Nature's* mean “% Not Cited” is similar to that of *Science*. The latter cases I found astonishing – and so did my colleagues. Perhaps it gives us

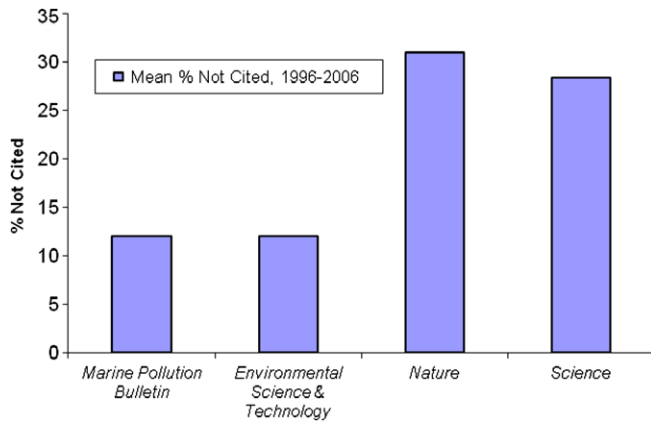


Fig. 1. Mean percentage of articles published during the period 1996–2006 that have never been cited to date (“% Not Cited”). Data are shown for *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, *Environmental Science and Technology*, *Nature* and *Science*. Data were derived from Scopus®, using the “Analytics” tool.

heart that we are, indeed, publishing our work in the appropriate places!

I hope that the addition of an abstract and keywords to the Baseline format will give our authors an improved chance of their excellent science being read and recognized. As always, I look forward to contributions to this section of our journal, as well as feedback from authors and readers.

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