

ON THE RELEVANCE OF MEIOBENTHIC RESEARCH FOR POLICY MAKERS

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Worldwide, there are increasing pressures on marine ecosystems. Humans have reduced and restructured most habitats, changed the distribution and abundance of species to support economic production and altered biogeochemical cycles and the chemical composition of the water column and sediments. The need for scientific advice to manage the marine environment in an ecosystem context to ensure sustainability has never been greater. This advice will require a stronger and more comprehensive scientific foundation than ever before. Consequently, there is an increasing emphasis on the need for new scientific knowledge to inform policy and management decisions. The majority of recent meiofauna studies focusing on environmental challenges point (a) to the urgent need for improved understanding of the functioning of marine systems and (b) to more effective communication of scientific findings to the public and policy arenas. But how good are we as meiobenthologists, both individually and collectively, in converting our science into sound environmental policy advice? I will reflect briefly on the role of (meiobenthic) research in meeting the challenges created by a changing world before moving on to illustrate how discrete pools of scientific and contextual knowledge of meiofauna can be used to inform policy and, at the same time, contribute to the fundamental understanding of man-made impacts on marine ecosystems.

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