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Marine journals, maritime territorial disputes and science-diplomacy

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When Hugo Grotius wrote *Mare Liberum* [Freedom of the Seas] in 1609, he was beginning to formulate political concepts that today sees him regarded as 'The father of International law'. The sea has always been a place where territorial claims and ambitions have led to conflict and today ~39% of the more than 400 maritime boundaries in existence are in dispute (Ásgeirsdóttir & Steinwand, 2016; Østhagen, 2020, 2021). Issues such as rising sea levels, diminishing stocks of marine natural capital, changes in distributions of marine resources and increased demand for these resources are all exacerbating the potential for further conflict in the marine environment (Byers & Østhagen, 2019). The key body for resolving maritime boundary disputes is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982) with its dispute-settlement mechanisms: International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS); the International Court of Justice; the Arbitral Tribunal; and the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). The best outcome is that countries resolve their disputes bilaterally rather than invoke third party arbitration or litigation under Article 287 of UNCLOS (Nyman & Tiller, 2020) or, more seriously, end up in a conflict, with all the associated economic and other risks (Mendoza *et al.*, 2019).

More recently however, territorial disputes have begun to be played out in a new arena – scientific journals. This was highlighted in the journal *Nature* (2011) where it was noted there was a 'disturbing trend' for maps in journals to reflect territorial claims in the South China Sea. The plea in the article was for scientists to 'stick to the science' and authors to 'depoliticize their articles'. Despite these pleas, the issue of territorial disputes playing out in the academic literature continues and, for the reasons stated above, marine-focused journals are particularly vulnerable. The Marine Biological Association has two journals and very recently had to deal with a dispute relating to names used in a manuscript for a specific sea and associated islands. In this case, handling editors were being sent 'official government advice' by a reviewer along with accusations on breach of ethics for publishing and claims that sampling had been undertaken illegally without appropriate permissions.

The challenge is that major journal publishers generally (Table 1) adopt a 'neutral' stance regarding territorial disputes; and, as confirmed by Wiley's policy, it falls to Editors-in-Chief, Handling Editors and reviewers to sort out disputes as an editorial issue. A web search across all the major publishers as well as bodies such as COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) resulted in very little information at all being found related to advice on what to do if territorial disputes between nations cause problems with a manuscript, for example in what map should be used or what name should be given where the designation for an island, sea or other feature is disputed. In addition to publishers, many governments including the UK (Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, Pers. Com.) also remain 'neutral' in other countries' territorial disputes, so it is left to scientists to navigate between different opinions, legal advice and official guidance – something that most marine biologists should not have to deal with in addition to standard scientific reviewing. This is not because scientists are living in ivory towers – many marine scientists today work at the science–policy interface dealing with issues such as integrity and trust in provision of scientific evidence (e.g. Frost *et al.*, 2017; Cvitanovic *et al.*, 2021) or are involved in the growing area of science-diplomacy (Gore *et al.*, 2020).

The marine science community also plays an important role in dispute resolution as a key evidence provider to the UNCLOS bodies on issues ranging from baseline measurements to demarcation of boundaries to mapping geological features and natural resource distribution (Polejack, 2021). Marine research is in fact contributing in numerous ways to facilitate dispute resolution. For example, since 1997 the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) has been promoting the 'parks for peace' initiative as 'a tool to enhance regional cooperation for biodiversity conservation, conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation, and sustainable regional development' (Sandwith *et al.*, 2001). Trans-boundary cooperation as a tool for peace and cooperation has a long history on land and is increasingly being used at sea. Prominent examples include the establishment of the Red Sea Marine Peace Park between Jordan and Israel as part of the 1994 peace treaty and there are now numerous other examples of marine peace parks in the Adriatic (Mackelworth *et al.*, 2013), South China Sea (McManus *et al.*, 2010) and elsewhere (Mackelworth, 2012). This work involves a wide range of marine academic expertise such as conservation, marine management and planning and species expertise (Mackelworth, 2012).

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Table 1. A summary of publisher / publishing body policies in relation to jurisdictional claims and territorial disputes

Publisher/body	Policy	Source
Springer Nature	'Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.'	https://www.nature.com/srep/journal-policies/editorial-policies some articles include 'publisher's note' with same statement.
Wiley	'Potential disputes over borders and territories may have direct relevance for authors when describing their research in a submitted manuscript, or in the address they use for correspondence. The choices made by authors should be respected, but should a perceived dispute or complaint be raised, then editorial teams should attempt to find a resolution that works for all parties. Ultimately, the final decision on content is an editorial matter and will rest with the journal editors which, where necessary, will be in consultation with the relevant society and publisher.'	https://authorservices.wiley.com/ethics-guidelines/index.html
Taylor & Francis	'Taylor & Francis' policy is to take a neutral stance in relation to territorial disputes or jurisdictional claims in its published content, including in maps and institutional affiliations. Where a journal is owned by and published on behalf of a society or other third party, Taylor & Francis will take into account that Society's policy on this issue to the extent it differs from Taylor & Francis' own.'	https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/editorial-policies/
Elsevier	No overarching statement found, but all editorial board information pages include the statement 'Elsevier remains neutral with regard to any jurisdictional claims'.	Example: https://www.journals.elsevier.com/computers-and-education-artificial-intelligence/editorial-board
Sage	None found externally	

The fact is that marine biology is a global discipline with research undertaken in a highly interconnected environment and where a larger geographic context is often vital for understanding. In this issue of the *Journal of the Marine Biological Association* (JMBA), research ranges in geographic extent from the south-eastern Pacific (Estupiñan-Montaño *et al.*, 2021); south-western Pacific (Gordon, 2021); south-western Atlantic (Delpiani *et al.*, 2021); NE Mediterranean (Seyhan Öztürk *et al.*, 2021); the southern Adriatic (Mandic *et al.*, 2021); the Aegean Sea (Cinar & Dagli, 2021); the Arabian sea (Dixit *et al.*, 2021); the Indian Ocean (David *et al.*, 2021); the South China Sea (Marshall & Taha, 2021); the Sea of Japan (Fujiwara *et al.*, 2021) and many others. As is usual for marine journals, many of these papers have authors from multiple countries since marine biology is a discipline that works best when carried out in a collaborative manner, working across national and global boundaries, bringing in multiple disciplines and sharing data and expertise freely. This is not just practical expediency – a diversity of approach, thought and personnel in scientific communities has been shown to be a crucial element in research success (Freeman & Huang, 2014). In this context, scientific collaboration becomes an easy venue for some states to impose their political interests when standards on boundary disputes for publication are lacking (*Nature*, 2011; Thuy Anh, 2020). This, in turn, can raise tensions and cause repercussions on both the quality and quantity of scientific collaboration among academics in different countries (Owen, 2020). Thus, since it is not the role of the scientific community to resolve interstate disputes, the only solution to avoid being a target for political propaganda is to establish unified approaches that are mandatory for the submission of academic work.

There is a need now for publishers and universities to recognize that territorial and other political disputes played out in the academic literature are an increasing problem requiring greater support and guidance for already overloaded academics. It is good to hear therefore that there is starting to be some movement on that front with publishers (for example, JMBA's publisher Cambridge University Press) recognizing the issue and starting to develop more support and guidance. However, while there is an opportunity for publishing companies to establish better guidance for authors, editors and reviewers, the danger arises that a lack of a harmonized system among the academic community, including publishers, may lead to more controversies than it addresses. Accordingly, global bodies such as the Committee on Publishing Ethics (COPE) are the most appropriate actors to establish parameters and uniform approaches to navigating the complex balance between maintaining editorial independence of journals and their owners or publishers, and providing appropriate support. No author, reviewer, Handling Editor or Editor-in-Chief should be operating 'in the dark' and clear rules of engagement for handling disputes in the literature are urgently required.

But ultimately, the onus is on us, the marine scientific community to hold ourselves and each other to account in not bringing politics into science. With a host of international collaborations being announced as part of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, marine biology is providing a great example of a community united for exploration, discovery and cooperation. This is therefore a plea to recognize the importance of diplomacy as we work together to address the serious challenges we are facing in our ocean – we must not let politics undermine our science.

Conflict of interest. J. Wright is employed by Cambridge University Press, the publisher of JMBA. Dr Wright is not involved in the editorial decision making or operations for this journal.

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