

What Scientists Want in an MPA Study Site: Interview with Callum Roberts

For a scientist's view on what researchers look for when considering MPA study sites, MPA News interviewed Callum Roberts of the University of York (UK). Roberts has conducted fish censuses at several MPAs in the Caribbean, and is author of multiple papers and reports on the effect of marine reserves on fish populations ([MPA News 3:6](#)).

MPA News: What criteria do you consider when searching for a field site to study?

ROBERTS: The key factors for me are, firstly, the suitability of the site for answering some question(s) of importance to science and management. The "and" is critical here. I think there is a great degree of overlap between rigorous, question-driven science and the needs of managers. So I look for places where it is possible to combine these interests. In practice, this means my research generally takes place in areas where there is some management experiment taking place (e.g., some areas are marine reserves), and where there are people actively overseeing the implementation of these management actions.

Secondly, the managers must be interested in supporting scientific research, and have a willingness to use the findings to help guide their management actions. Finally, easy accessibility to field sites and good sea conditions are a big plus!

MPA News: What advice would you offer to managers on attracting scientists to conduct applied research at their MPAs?

ROBERTS: Places where there is real management going on - as opposed to just paper parks or places where there are wardens but regulations are not enforced - will be highly attractive to scientists. If there is no management, there is no "experiment" for a scientist to study (although they could look at reasons for failure).

For effective managers, the main challenge is choosing among the many proposals they receive. For me, the following factors would be important in selecting whom to support:

- (1) the degree to which the proposal fits with management needs;
- (2) the acceptability of the research in relation to the goals of management;
- (3) the length of commitment of the researchers to the site (multiple visits are better than single visits - they give managers more leverage in getting reports out of scientists, for one thing); and
- (4) the track record of the scientists: Have they delivered reports promised in other places they have worked? Are they willing to become involved locally, giving presentations at meetings or advice to managers and decision makers? If they are students, are they working with a more senior scientist and will that scientist visit the site?

For more information

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