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Abstract

Studies of how scientists select research problems suggest the process involves weighing a number of factors, including funding availability, likelihood of success versus failure, and perceived publishability of likely results, among others. In some fields, a strong personal interest in conducting science to bring about particular social and environmental outcomes plays an important role.

Conservation biologists are frequently motivated by a desire that their research will contribute to improved conservation outcomes, which introduces a pair of challenging questions for managers of science and scholars of policies governing science: 1) How do scientists integrate that goal into their processes of research priority evaluation, and 2) How can managers and funders of science utilize that knowledge in designing and administering funding programs? I use Q method to uncover four distinct schools of thought amongst researchers and knowledge-users about the merits of possible research priorities for coral reefs; one of the axes along which these schools of thought differ is in their interpretation of how science can and should interact with policy. The results reveal that perceived

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severity of reef stressors plays a role for some participants. Disciplinary training does not appear to be a major influence on research priority evaluation, but individual participants indicated professional expediency does prevent some researchers from pursuing or advocating that others pursue topics outside of that disciplinary specialty. Influences on and processes in research prioritization uncovered in this study have the potential to lead to counter-productive disciplinary path dependencies. From these results and building on outside literature, I conclude that better coordination and communication about research priorities across disciplines and with broader stakeholders ? including knowledge users ? could improve the research enterprise?s ability to contribute to meaningful societal and conservation goals. These findings are relevant to researchers and research administrators across disciplines that seek to conduct or fund science that is useful in addressing specific goals. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)