Editorial

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Published online: 10 November 2017
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As the newly appointed Editor-in-Chief (EIC) of *Coral Reefs*, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Howard (Howie) Lasker, and all previous EICs, for their service to the journal. Howie became EIC in 2013 and worked tirelessly to maintain the position and impact of *Coral Reefs* during a very tumultuous period for science publishing. Aside from the continual launch of many new journals, this period saw some fundamental changes in the business models and publication strategies for many of the major publishers. Traditional print-based journals (such as *Coral Reefs*), which have inherent constraints on production and page lengths, now compete with journals that were born online and are entirely electronic. Despite these challenges, *Coral Reefs* remains at the forefront of marine and freshwater research journals and has a very important

role in promoting research that will help to address the myriad of issues impacting on corals reefs.

While Howie has passed the baton, the rest of the editorial team, including all the established topic editors (Dr. Anastazia Banaszak, Dr. Line Bay, Dr. Michael Berumen, Dr. Simon Davy, Dr. Eberhard Gischler, Dr. Alistair Harborne, Dr. Andrew Hoey, Dr. Mark Patterson, Dr. Stuart Sandin, and Dr. Mark Vermeij) are continuing in their roles. Behind the scenes, we have also retained the expertise of a very effective publishing team, overseen by Alexandrine Cheronet, Sheeba Martin and Amit Dixit. These stalwarts of the journal are also supported by a large editorial board with exceptional collective expertise and experience.

The sustained and ongoing success of *Coral Reefs* is very much dependent upon the continued loyalty and service of coral reef scientists across the globe. The collective goal of both the editorial and production teams is to maintain the relevance and standing of *Coral Reefs*, and be the preferred journal for all specialist research papers on coral reef organisms and processes. To better serve potential authors, we recognize that we must improve efficiencies across the submission, editorial and review processes. First and foremost, we are relaxing formatting requirements for new submissions, so that there is no need for authors to adhere to the specific journal formatting requirements until their paper is actually accepted. We are also embracing Special Issues on topics of particular relevance for coral reefs and draw your attention to the recent announcement of a Special Issue on “*The 2014–2017 Global Coral Bleaching Event*,” with Dr. Mark Eakin, Dr. Rusty Brainard and Dr. Hugh Sweatman to serve as guest editors. From 2019, *Coral Reefs* will move to 6 issues per year (rather than 4) to accommodate up to one Special

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Issue each year. I welcome submissions from potential guest editors suggesting topics for future Special Issues.

The editorial team is also working to reduce the time from submission to publication, reigning in the extended periods that some manuscripts are *in review*. We take full responsibility for delays in handling and processing manuscripts, but one of the biggest bottlenecks is the review process. We will maintain our unwavering commitment to ensure each and every manuscript is externally and independently reviewed, but there are an ever-increasing number of researchers (often established researchers) who consistently, or periodically, refuse to review papers that are well within their area of expertise and current interest (as evident by their own recent submissions to *Coral Reefs*). Worst still, many of these researchers never actually respond to review requests, and so we are left waiting and wondering whether they will ultimately deliver the necessary review as the deadline approaches. If not, we have to source alternative reviewers and then restart the clock to allow sufficient time for new reviewers to complete reviews. We can call upon editorial board members to undertake rapid reviews, but have done this sparingly and may have to consider ways to make better use of this invaluable resource.

There are, of course, those ever-reliable reviewers who conduct a disproportionate number of reviews and are very efficient. We hope we can continue to call on such people, and even recruit them to our editorial board in recognition

of their important contributions to the journal. However, we cannot over burden recurrent reviewers. With increasing numbers of new submissions and declines in the reviewer base, we have little option but to reject or return an increasing number of manuscripts without review. This will inevitably lead to increasing dissent among potential authors, but the editorial burden is further compounded by the number of authors that challenge decisions or write directly to complain about delays in the review process. To date, I have felt compelled to personally respond to each and every query or complaint. However, this is detracting from time spent dealing with submissions and reforming the policies and procedures of the journal. In future, we will communicate expected handling and reviewing timeframes on the website and only respond to author requests for updates in exceptional circumstances.

As EIC, I am embracing the challenges facing *Coral Reefs* (the journal) and coral reefs (the ecosystem) and look forward to working with scientists to promote their critical and significant research. I encourage all coral reef scientists to revisit the journal website to keep abreast of changes being made to the journal policies and types of manuscripts being considered. I also welcome any comments or suggestions on how to better meet the needs of potential authors. Above all, I encourage all scientists to continue to submit relevant manuscripts to *Coral Reefs* and also accede to our requests for reviews on research conducted by your peers.