

Grey Literature in the Life of GESAMP, an International Marine Scientific Advisory Body

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Abstract: GESAMP, an international marine scientific advisory group sponsored by several UN bodies, has published significant reports on marine pollution and marine environmental protection since it was established in 1969. Although thoroughly reviewed and refereed, many of GESAMP's publications fit within the internationally-accepted definition of grey literature. Since grey literature can be difficult to identify and locate, are GESAMP's publications ever used? GESAMP serves as an exceptionally good organization to test for access to and uses of grey literature. Through an analysis of its publications this paper shows that even when an organization relies on grey literature as its primary means of output, the publications can receive extensive use. Nevertheless, problems of identification and access remain, and are not fully addressed by digital publication. Many of these problems could be minimized by following recommendations included in the paper.

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Introduction

For over thirty years, GESAMP, a leading international scientific advisory body on marine pollution and marine environmental protection, has been publishing significant reports. Often printed in limited press runs, the reports are, nonetheless, comprehensive assessments of the health of global marine environments by scientific experts. Produced by an organization that is sponsored by intergovernmental United Nations agencies in "formats not controlled by commercial publishing," these reports clearly fit the internationally-accepted definition of grey literature.¹ Furthermore, the idiosyncratic publishing features of GESAMP reports, coupled with their handling by indexing services, highlight the complexity and problems of this genre. For decades researchers and organizations have grappled with handling publications of this sort (Posnett and Baulkwill, 1982; Auger, 1998; Luzi, 2000; Søndergaard, Andersen, & Hjørland, 2003). Yet, as our analysis of the GESAMP reports shows, problems of identification and access continue even when recent major developments and advancements in digital publishing might resolve some of the issues.

In the same period that GESAMP has been publishing, other "governments, intergovernmental groups (e.g., the United Nations and its agencies, ICES², OECD³) and non-governmental groups around the world have reported...on the overall condition or state of the marine environment" (Wells, 2003, p. 1219), one of the key functions of GESAMP. Therefore, why should any interest be paid to the publication and diffusion of GESAMP reports on similar topics? Beyond the usefulness of the reports to policy and decision

¹ Grey literature was defined by the Third International Conference on Grey Literature (1997, p. iii) as "that which is produced by all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers."

² International Council for the Exploration of the Sea

³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development