

## Entering Grey Waters: Challenges and Solutions of Providing Access to Non-traditional literature in an Aquarium's library

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### Introduction

The seventy year old library collection at the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium (CMA) has grown steadily from its humble beginnings as the original collection of the old Cabrillo Marine Museum at the Cabrillo Beach Bathhouse in San Pedro, California. Until recently, the library was run by the Education/Collections curator and assisted by one volunteer who helped to catalogue the collection using the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, did inventories, data entry and other library-related activities. In 2004, the *Virginia Reid Moore (VRM) Marine Research Library* was opened as part of a CMA Expansion Project and a librarian was hired full-time to administer and manage the library and two part-time assistants have been hired to assist running the library.

The VRM Library is a small collection of about 2,000 + books, mostly in the marine sciences (marine invertebrates, ecology and fishes) and 40 titles of donated journals and magazines, of which about 5 are current paid subscriptions (*California Fish and Game Bulletin*, *Fishery Bulletin*, *Marine Mammal Science*, *Nature*, and *Science News*). But, our strength lies in the grey area beyond books and journals, where a large quantity of useful information resides. One of the unique characteristics of the VRM Marine Research Library collection is the wide variety and quantity of *grey literature* and *ephemera* materials from a wide variety of sources: local environmental organizations, historical societies, governmental reports, other aquariums publications, etc... These documents have valuable and unique information which often is not found elsewhere. These materials are vital to the VRM collection since they are rarely collected by traditional libraries and offer a rare view of non-traditional materials by non-profit, private and community organizations with common interests with the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium mission of research and education about the marine life of Southern California.

Unfortunately, these materials are inaccessible to users. Although the materials have been finally relocated to the library, they are still housed in boxes without indexes or any other access point. To begin to address this problem, the library requested that the aquarium administration invest \$4,500 to acquire high-density file cabinets to help preserve and provide access to this material. The cabinets have been delivered and installed in the library but the biggest challenge remains—indexing and making this collection accessible. Our goal is not only to secure the proper storage of these materials but also to centralize and supply access to these valuable resources. To achieve this goal, a three-pronged strategy was designed to give access and further develop our grey literature and ephemera collection: indexing and thesaurus development; database with online search capabilities and outreaching to local and regional organizations to update and expand the current collection.

This paper will discuss the challenges of collecting and preserving grey literature and ephemera in the marine science knowledge-domain, and the design, execution and expected outcome of this VRM library initiative.

### Swimming in Grey Waters: Challenges and Solutions to Manage Grey Literature and Ephemera

Grey literature and ephemera are discussed in this presentation, because both types of publications are part of the collection and are worth preserving for their rich information content and uniqueness. Grey Net defines *grey literature* as "Information produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in electronic and print formats not controlled by commercial publishing."<sup>i</sup> *Ephemera* is a term that has been defined as: "Items manufactured for a specific, limited use, and usually intended to be discarded thereafter, especially printed matter on paper."<sup>ii</sup> This definition does not convey the reality of most ephemera collections, since indeed instead of being discarded a great quantity of ephemera is collected and preserved. For the purposes of this paper, ephemera are defined as:

Materials (physical or electronic) that regardless of appearance, quality or quantity, and that at some point were considered disposable and of little value or no value, through time, had become valuable in such a way that it had broadened their appeal and made them desirable to be collected and preserved by individuals, collectors and information institutions. These materials become the non-traditional, alternative evidence of mainstream and non-mainstream groups in society. (Ramos-Lum 2002, 9)