

## GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWERS

The selection of reviewers plays a vital role in maintaining the quality and integrity of the peer review process. We kindly ask all reviewers to treat the invitation and the manuscript with the utmost confidentiality. Manuscripts submitted to the *Croatian Journal of Fisheries* undergo a **single-anonymized peer review process**. In this model, the identities of the authors are known to the reviewers, while the reviewers remain anonymous to the authors. The editorial team overseeing the process is aware of all identities involved.

### General Information for Reviewers

Serving as a peer reviewer is both an honor and a critical responsibility that contributes directly to the advancement of scientific knowledge. Your time and expertise are deeply valued, and your careful evaluation plays a key role in maintaining the scientific integrity and quality of the *Croatian Journal of Fisheries*.

All submissions undergo an initial screening by the **Editor-in-Chief** and the assigned **Associate Editor** to determine whether the manuscript aligns with the journal's scope and editorial standards. Manuscripts deemed suitable for further consideration are then assigned to **two or three independent reviewers** based on their subject-matter expertise. Authors are welcome to suggest potential reviewers during submission; however, these suggestions are only considered after a careful assessment of their independence and suitability, including checks for potential conflicts of interest.

### Editorial Decisions and Role of Reviewer Feedback

After receiving the referee reports, the editor will make one of the following decisions:

- **Accept** the manuscript as submitted or with minor revisions
- **Request a minor revision** – if there are some comments requesting minor changes
- **Request a major revision** from the authors before making a final decision
- **Reject** the manuscript due to insufficient originality, methodological flaws, or lack of scientific contribution

Reviewers are invited to provide confidential recommendations to the editor, suggesting one of the above courses of action. However, it is important to understand that the final decision rests with the editor, who must weigh differing opinions and assess the validity of arguments from both reviewers and authors.

Therefore, the most valuable referee reports are those that are:

- **Clear and well-reasoned**, outlining both strengths and weaknesses
- **Evidence-based**, supporting critiques with examples from the manuscript
- **Constructive and respectful**, offering guidance that can help authors improve their work—even if the ultimate recommendation is rejection

We ask reviewers to ensure that the manuscript entrusted to them is used solely for the purpose of evaluation and not for any personal or professional gain. Reviewers are chosen either upon recommendation by the Associate Editor or through a targeted search in

academic databases using the key words provided by the authors. Once you receive the invitation letter along with the manuscript for review, we kindly request that you proceed as follows:

- Begin by reading the manuscript's title and abstract to assess whether it aligns with your area of expertise.
- Reply the invitation email to either accept or decline the review request.
- If you are unable to complete the review due to time constraints or a conflict of interest, promptly notify the editor. Extensions or reassignment of the review can be arranged accordingly.
- Complete the reviewer's evaluation form and provide constructive, objective comments regarding the manuscript.
- Before submitting your review, ensure that your name is not included in the comments intended for the authors.
- If you choose to insert comments directly into the manuscript file, please check your document settings to confirm that your name does not appear alongside the annotations.

### **Conflict of Interest and Ethical Responsibilities of Reviewers**

At the *Croatian Journal of Fisheries*, we place great trust in our reviewers to uphold the highest standards of integrity throughout the peer review process. Reviewers serve a crucial role in helping us identify potential ethical issues or breaches of publication policy prior to the acceptance of any manuscript. We kindly ask that reviewers remain vigilant for the following concerns:

- **Plagiarism** or unattributed content
- **Dual submission or duplicate publication** (the same or substantially similar work being submitted to multiple journals)
- **Incomplete or missing ethical declarations**, such as a lack of ethical approval or informed consent where applicable
- **Improper citation or misrepresentation of prior research**

To maintain objectivity and transparency, we make every effort to avoid inviting reviewers who may have a potential conflict of interest. This includes, but is not limited to, individuals who:

- Are currently collaborating or have recently collaborated with the authors
- Have reviewed earlier drafts of the manuscript
- Are engaged in direct academic or commercial competition with the authors
- Have had personal disputes or professional disagreements with the authors
- Have any financial stake or vested interest in the publication outcome

While we strive to identify and avoid such situations, we recognize that some conflicts may not be immediately apparent to the Editorial Office. For this reason, we ask reviewers to notify us promptly if they are aware of any circumstances that could compromise their impartiality or create the perception of bias.

In line with the Journal's editorial policy:

- **Members of the Editorial Board** and their close associates are fully excluded from the evaluation process if they are listed as authors on a submitted manuscript.

- Manuscripts are **not assigned to reviewers** from the same institution or from the same country as the authors, in order to ensure a neutral and unbiased review process.

## Publication Policy and Ethical Considerations

While the *Croatian Journal of Fisheries* takes proactive steps to uphold ethical publishing standards, the role of peer reviewers is essential in identifying potential violations that may not be immediately apparent to the Editorial Office. As experts in their respective fields, reviewers are often in the best position to recognize issues such as:

- **Plagiarism** or uncredited use of others' work
- **Undisclosed conflicts of interest**
- **Data manipulation or falsification**
- **Authorship disputes or inappropriate author contributions**
- **Suspected ethical misconduct related to human or animal research**

If you suspect any ethical or policy-related concerns while reviewing a manuscript, you are **strongly encouraged to report these issues directly to the editor** overseeing the submission. The editorial team will then investigate the matter in accordance with the best practices and procedures outlined by the **Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)**.

## Initial Editorial Assessment and Grounds for Immediate Rejection

Before a manuscript enters the peer review process, it undergoes a preliminary evaluation by the editorial team to determine its suitability for the journal. At this stage, certain submissions may be declined without external review if they do not meet the journal's basic editorial standards.

Common reasons for immediate rejection include:

- Poorly structured or unclear writing that hinders understanding
- A lack of scientific rigor or a non-academic tone
- Topics that are already extensively covered in the existing literature without offering new insights
- Use of outdated methodologies that no longer contribute meaningfully to current scientific discourse
- Failure to follow the journal's **Instructions for Authors**, resulting in formatting or structural issues that require significant corrections

## Overview of the Most Common Mistakes in Manuscripts Submitted to the *Croatian Journal of Fisheries*

To assist authors in preparing manuscripts that meet the editorial standards of the *Croatian Journal of Fisheries* (CJF), we wish to highlight the most frequently observed errors both during the submission process and within the manuscripts themselves.

## Common Manuscript Preparation Issues

1. **Incomplete or incorrectly formatted title page** – The title page must include all required elements, such as the running title, author details, and affiliations.
2. **Abstract exceeds the 300-word limit** – The abstract should be concise, informative, and not exceed the prescribed word count.
3. **Incorrect formatting of scientific names** – Genus and species names must be italicized and formatted according to scientific conventions.
4. **Inappropriate use of active voice** – Manuscripts must be written in the **passive voice**; use of the first-person plural (“we”) should be avoided.
5. **Use of footnotes in the main text** – Footnotes are not allowed and should be removed from the manuscript.
6. **Low-quality figures** – Figures must be clear, of high resolution, and maintain readability (including font sizes) when resized for publication.
7. **Improper table and figure formatting** – Authors often overlook formatting standards:
  - Tables must be created using Word’s table function, not as images or Excel screenshots.
  - Common figure issues include poor-quality graphs, excessive framing, unclear data points, unrefined lines, insufficient axis labels, and misplaced titles.
8. **Incorrectly formatted references** – References must strictly adhere to the journal’s citation style. Issues often arise when manuscripts prepared for other journals are submitted without adjustment. Note, for example, that *et al.* should **not** be italicized.
9. **Missing access dates in web citations** – All online sources must include the date of last access.

By reviewing this list and adhering to the journal’s formatting and ethical standards, authors can significantly improve the efficiency of the editorial and peer-review process, increasing the likelihood of a successful submission.