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IMAS scientist's grant to assess biodiversity benefits of Marine Protected Areas

An IMAS scientist is one of just nine conservation researchers worldwide to be awarded the 2021 fellowship in marine conservation through the [Pew Fellows Program in Marine Conservation](#).

Associate Professor Rick Stuart-Smith will receive \$150,000 to develop methods to better measure how effective marine protected areas (MPAs) are in delivering their intended benefits for people and biodiversity.

Assoc Prof Stuart-Smith said he is honoured to receive the Pew Fellowship, and to have this opportunity to develop an underwater auditing system that is set to improve how MPA effectiveness is measured around the world.

"Monitoring programs are in place for many MPAs globally, but they often use different, and sometimes indirect, methods to measure management success," Assoc Prof Stuart-Smith said.

"Without consistent and detailed tracking of ecological measures of management success across the global network of MPAs, it's difficult to know if we are achieving the targets associated with international biodiversity agreements that drove the expansion of MPAs in the first place.

"There is no point having MPAs if they are not being effective for conserving marine life, and confirmation of what makes them successful in any given circumstance is needed to be able to do MPAs right," he said.

Assoc Prof Stuart-Smith, who co-founded and leads the citizen science program [Reef Life Survey](#) (RLS) with Professor Graham Edgar and the RLS team at IMAS, will analyse existing data collected from underwater surveys at more than 175 MPAs. He will also collaborate with local teams and other Pew Fellows to assess how the condition of reef biodiversity has changed in many of the world's MPAs over the last decade.

For 25 years, the Pew Fellows Program has supported mid-career scientists and other experts seeking solutions to challenges affecting the world's oceans. Fellows are selected by an international committee of marine science experts, following a rigorous nomination and review process.

Assoc Prof Stuart-Smith joins Pew's global community of 189 marine Fellows from 40 countries, all working to expand our knowledge of the ocean and advance the sustainable use of marine resources.

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