

Correspondence

Storytelling can be a powerful tool for science

Stories can be used to misrepresent science (M. Blastland *et al. Nature* 587, 362–364; 2020). But credible science communication and storytelling are not mutually exclusive – they can be great allies.

In contrast with straight communication of experimental results, telling individual research stories portrays science as a human-driven endeavour, full of successes, uncertainties, missteps and failures, which in turn promotes transparency. What really matters is what story is being told and by whom.

For example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) uses storytelling to engage a wider range of stakeholders with its findings (go.nature.com/3byfp25). An emphasis on case studies in IPCC reports helps to ground the complexity of climate change by illustrating theoretical concepts. The IPCC perceives no conflict between a narrative approach and its mandate to neutrally inform policymaking with the latest science.

In an era of alternative facts, misinformation and the urgent need to promote evidence-based thinking among the public, the scientific enterprise should remain open to learning from other sectors of society – including the arts and humanities (J. Ettinger *Nature* <https://doi.org/ggzww9>; 2020).

Joshua Ettinger, Friederike E. L. Otto, E. Lisa F. Schipper
University of Oxford, UK.
joshua.ettinger@ouce.ox.ac.uk



Boost for fish farms as ocean fish stocks affected by climate change.

More than 100 aquatic-science societies sound climate alarm

Prompted by the urgency of the situation, 111 aquatic-science societies – representing more than 80,000 scientists from 7 continents – have issued a statement on how anthropogenic climate change is affecting marine and freshwater ecosystems, with a plea to avoid their further degradation and to speed mitigation (see go.nature.com/2lq9zma).

This year is crucial: the United Nations Climate Change Conference in November is widely considered the last chance to unify action; the United States has elected a presidential administration on the country's most ambitious climate platform; the European Green Deal is under way; and pledges to reach net-zero emissions from China, Japan and South Korea are nearing the targets set by the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic should help to focus efforts to curb trends such as

melting of ice sheets, ocean warming and acidification, and changes in precipitation patterns and freshwater flow, as well as to alleviate their impacts (see go.nature.com/3sndjyu).

These societies call on world leaders and the public to act now to protect and sustain global aquatic ecosystems and their services, on which we all depend. Time is running out to control emissions, improve adaptation measures and reduce other environmental stressors that act synergistically with climate change.

Scott A. Bonar* American Fisheries Society, Tucson, Arizona, USA.
scott_bonar@msn.com
*On behalf of 11 signatories; see go.nature.com/3stjamk

Journals – women's marital status is none of your business

We find it anachronistic and bizarre that many journals, including *Science*, *The Lancet*, *Cell*, *The New England Journal of Medicine* and, until last month, *Nature*, provide an option for female scientists – but not male ones – to give their marital status on registration or manuscript submission. Science should keep up with or get ahead of society: terms denoting unmarried women in non-English languages, such as 'Mademoiselle' and 'Fräulein', have been banished from professional contexts in continental Europe for decades.

The plethora of honorifics for prospective authors include gender-neutral academic titles (doctor, professor), gendered non-marital titles (Mr, Ms) and, in some cases, a non-binary, non-marital title (Mx). But many influential scientific publications offer the alternatives 'Mrs' and 'Miss'. Even if those terms are intended for use only as a courteous salutation in exchanges with the author, linguistic associations can still shape people's implicit judgements (M. Lewis and G. Lupyán *Nature Hum. Behav.* 4, 1021–1028; 2020).

In our view, marital status, and nomenclature associating a woman's name with it, has no place in this context, in the scientific community or in the current century.

Anna Zychlinsky Scharff, Alexandra Jablonka, Christine Happle Hannover Medical School, Hannover, Germany.
happle.christine@mh-hannover.de