

SCIENTISTS SAY “NO MORE” TO HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION AT CONFERENCES

By Eilidh Gilbert

St. John's, Newfoundland & Labrador (June 22) — While most workplaces have explicit anti-harassment policies, scientific conferences do not, and organizers of the [4th International Marine Conservation Congress](#) (IMCC4, St John's NL, July 30-Aug 3) decided this needs to change. In a [paper](#), published June 22nd in the journal *Frontiers in Marine Science*, IMCC4 organizers describe their new [Code of Conduct](#) and call on organizers of all conferences to develop similar guidelines of behavior for their own events.

The paper makes the case for conferences to always have codes of conduct in place, and showcases how IMCC organizers built their own code of conduct for their upcoming event. The IMCC code of conduct, which can also be viewed on a section of the conference website detailing the meeting's [inclusion policies](#), outlines the event's expectations of behavior.

“IMCC organizers have created a vision for the future of conservation science which favors the inclusion of people from all over the world to share ideas and to collaborate,” says Tracey Jordan, an independent HR consultant who coauthored the paper.

By establishing guidelines for acceptable behavior, IMCC organizers strive to create an environment where inclusiveness is embraced, and harassment and bullying of any kind are explicitly disallowed.

“There are many amazing scientists who also happen to be female, ethnic minorities, members of the LGBTQ community, and differently abled who feel conferences are not places they can feel free to completely be themselves and contribute in the best possible way,” says IMCC4 Chair Samantha Oester. “Not only is this discriminatory, but science and the world may miss out on great advancements because of it. Codes of conduct are important and key in providing safe spaces.”

At a time when scientific societies are working to increase diversity within their members, organizers are aware that harassment directly impacts careers and forces victims out of their chosen scientific discipline.

“Ultimately this is about making delegates safe, so that we can promote diversity and push back against the type of harassment that drives people away from science,” says IMCC4 Local Chair Brett Favaro.

IMCC is an inclusive event with a global delegation. Organizers are taking steps to ensure that delegates feel confident in a safe environment to present work, network, and voice opinions and concerns.

“Many people have had very negative experiences at conferences,” says Oester. “They feel they can't speak up, or if they did speak up, they weren't taken seriously. This is incredibly disheartening, and we don't want IMCC to contribute to those issues. It is possible to have healthy debates, arguments, activities, and even fun, without allowing certain behaviors.”