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“The metapopulation concept in coastal waters”: preface

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Metapopulation ecology has become a popular concept in terrestrial and limnic environments and receives increasing attention in coastal waters. During a workshop held from 26 to 30 September 2001 at the Alfred Wegener Institute, Wattenmeerstation Sylt, we tried to explore to what extent metapopulation theory helps to answer questions on the spatial and temporal structure of marine

organisms. Volume 57, part 1 of *Helgoland Marine Research* contains papers presented during this workshop. The first paper, by Grimm et al., gives an introduction to metapopulation theory and summarises the extensive discussions that took place during the workshop. The main finding was that the usefulness of the metapopulation concept lies in the questions that are asked when the concept is applied; in other words, when the metapopulation concept is a working hypothesis with the concept being explicitly defined, and with questions clearly linked to the concept.

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