

# IS CITIZEN SCIENCE A TOOL FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

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## BACKGROUND

Citizen science projects are those that involve non-scientist volunteers in the scientific process, for example, in data collection, project design, data analysis, or co-creation (Bonney et al., 2016). Citizen science is therefore often described as 'engaging' or 'empowering' the 'public' although it is unclear whether the projects are truly designed to do so.

## AIMS

Our research aimed to explore how scientists perceived citizen science and interacted with their volunteers.

## DESIGN AND METHODS

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 19 Australian biologists, using qualitative thematic coding methods to analyse the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006)

## RESULTS

Almost all participants defined citizen science as involving non-scientists in data collection. This definition acted as a barrier for scientists who did not see how citizen science could suit their research objectives. Biologists who had experience running citizen science projects felt that volunteers benefitted from the partnership, but recognised that most volunteers already had a high level of existing engagement with science.

## CONCLUSIONS

While interviewees perceived many societal and experiential benefits of contributory citizen science, deliberate design is needed to realise the full potential of citizen science for public engagement.

## REFERENCES

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