

Preserving Interpretable Evidence in Environmental Molecular Sampling

Varun Sharma | VARUNÉ Bio

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Author approved release edition. Literature analysis and proposed research; no new VARUNÉ experimental results are reported.

Abstract

Preservation is useful when it protects the biological inference a sample is intended to support. DNA concentration, target detection, community representation, fragment integrity, and recoverable biochemical function are different endpoints. This report connects selected metagenomics chapters with primary freshwater, marine, laboratory, and autonomous-sampling studies to examine when those endpoints agree and when they diverge. The literature contains both consequential preservation effects and cases in which alternative workflows preserve similar ecological information. A particularly informative ocean deployment recovered less DNA after ambient storage whilst retaining similar COI biodiversity estimates. The analytical contribution developed here is an endpoint-specific comparison framework that treats the collection, preservation, extraction, and measurement sequence as one system. It does not propose a universal preservative or claim a newly discovered law. Four quantitative relations clarify recovery, compositional distortion, repeated detection, and mission cost. A bounded VARUNÉ Bio research proposal would test whether one component improves a partner's specified decision without introducing unacceptable representation bias or operational burden. The proposed contribution is a compatibility and interpretation package, potentially followed by a qualified consumable or method. No VARUNÉ preservation performance, customer demand, or field validation is established by this literature analysis.

1 The question that preservation must answer

What must remain true about a sample after collection for the intended conclusion to remain defensible? This question should precede selection of a preservation material. A monitoring team seeking evidence of a rare fish, a microbial ecologist comparing community composition, and a discovery programme seeking intact genetic context do not ask interchangeable questions. The sample may originate in the same water, yet its useful properties differ across those tasks.

The 2010 metagenomics volume supplied for this research distinguishes sequence surveys from functional screening and recognises differential recovery and selection during preparation. Its marine chapter distinguishes water-column organisms from attached communities and host-associated material. Its wide-host-range chapter explains that a functional screen depends on expression and the assay context, in addition to representation of the original genes. These are methodological foundations rather than current product comparisons. [\[1-3\]](#)

The author analysis developed here is that preservation should be specified as a relationship between a sample and a downstream decision. A statement such as “more DNA was recovered” is an observation. “The ecosystem was represented more faithfully” is a different proposition. “The

sample retained greater discovery potential” is a third. Progress requires deciding which proposition matters and measuring the evidence needed for it.

The practical question for VARUNÉ Bio is therefore narrower than whether a polar polymer can protect biomolecules. It is whether a defined component improves an identified sampling workflow enough to change a scientific or operational decision. This formulation leaves room for a polymer, a container treatment, a preservation method, an integrity control, or no new material at all.

2 Scope and source selection

This is a targeted critical narrative synthesis. It is not a systematic review, a meta-analysis, or a report of newly generated experimental data. The evidence base combines selected passages from three uploaded textbook chapters with primary literature located and checked on 28 October 2026. Search terms included “environmental DNA preservation extraction storage”, “filter preservation bias metabarcoding”, “environmental DNA inhibition dilution”, “consistent correctable bias metagenomic sequencing”, and “autonomous eDNA sampler preservation marine”. Reference and institutional records were used to verify bibliographic information and identify accessible primary papers.

Selection favoured comparisons in which preservation could be linked to a specified endpoint, and studies that challenged a simple “more DNA is better” interpretation. Freshwater fish detection, freshwater metazoan composition, marine fish metabarcoding, marine sediment biomonitoring, and autonomous seawater collection were retained as separate contexts. Functional-metagenomics and contamination studies were included to examine the boundaries of inference. Studies were not pooled quantitatively because their matrices, controls, filters, storage histories, assays, and objectives differ.

Full publisher text was available for selected methods, results, and limitations in the Hinlo, Bizzozzero, Mauvisseau, Preston, McLaren, and Salter papers. Majaneva was checked through publisher and indexed primary-paper passages; full-page retrieval was intermittent. Dully, Hendricks, and McKee are used conservatively from primary abstracts or institutional records because complete text access was incomplete. Rich was checked through the primary abstract and indexed author-manuscript content. Supplements were not comprehensively audited, and raw datasets were not reanalysed. These distinctions limit the depth of comparative claims.

The uploaded metagenomics file is *Metagenomics Methods and Protocols*, volume 668, edited by Streit and Daniel in 2010. For this report, selected conceptual passages were reread from chapters 1, 3, and 5; earlier work recorded broader chapter coverage. This report does not add a claim that the full book, or every shortlisted chapter, has been read. Historical kit and platform descriptions are not treated as present-day recommendations.

3 Define the endpoint before ranking the method

Table 1 separates the observations that are often compressed into “sample quality”. The distinction is analytical: a successful measurement at one level may be useful without validating another level.

Table 1 Evidence required for different preservation claims

Intended use	Primary evidence to preserve	What cannot substitute for it
Detect a specified target	Detection performance at relevant concentrations, with specificity and inhibition controls	Total DNA concentration alone
Compare communities	Reproducible representation and a stable ecological conclusion under the chosen analysis	A longer species list alone
Recover genetic context	Fragment and locus integrity adequate for the intended reconstruction	One short positive amplicon
Discover biochemical function	Representation plus a usable expression and activity route	Sequence annotation alone
Support a mission decision	Acceptable inference, traceability, and operating reliability	Successful collection without interpretable results

A workflow may be excellent for one row and unsuitable for another. This is not necessarily a defect. The defect is allowing evidence from one row to support an untested claim in another. A proposed multi-purpose archive should therefore list the purposes it actually supports rather than acquire the broad label “well preserved”.

The reference also needs definition. An immediately extracted aliquot is a useful operational comparator, but it is not an omniscient view of the original environment. A frozen aliquot is another workflow with its own extraction behaviour. A constructed reference can have known inputs but may omit physical properties of natural particles. Agreement with any one reference answers a bounded question, not every question about fidelity.

4 Primary comparisons that change the interpretation

4.1 Freshwater detection does not define community preservation

Hinlo and colleagues compared capture, preservation, extraction, and storage combinations using Oriental weatherloach in controlled aquaria. Their results favoured particular cellulose-nitrate filtration, ethanol or frozen storage, and extraction combinations for recovery of the target. The first experiment used three technical replicates per treatment, so its precision should not be mistaken for replication across independent ecosystems. The study provides useful evidence for a defined detection workflow, not a universal ranking of preservatives across communities. [4]

Majaneva and colleagues examined metazoan composition in river and lake samples. Dry or lysis-buffer preservation produced more consistent community profiles; ethanol could yield relatively high DNA concentration yet fewer taxa and more variable composition. Handling of ethanol-preserved filters was a possible explanation. This is an instructive contrast with a successful targeted-detection workflow, not proof that either paper is wrong. Their endpoints, samples, and processing differ. [5]

The author's inference is that preservation rankings are conditional on the observation being ranked. A method can increase the recoverable signal of a nominated target whilst reducing confidence in a community comparison. It would be scientifically inappropriate to collapse the two studies into a single winner. The useful next question is whether the proposed workflow has an endpoint-specific advantage under the partner's conditions.

4.2 A marine combination cannot identify a single causal ingredient

Bizzozzero and colleagues examined marine fish metabarcoding in Shark Bay using 32 samples, four collection days, two filter types, two storage approaches, and storage intervals of 30-68 days. Cellulose-nitrate combinations were comparatively consistent; glass-fibre combinations showed greater losses or shifts. Filter material and pore size varied together, storage temperatures differed, extraction handling differed, immediate extraction was absent, and field blanks were not included. The article also reports inconsistent glass-fibre pore sizes across sections. These findings support evaluating combinations, but do not isolate a universal filter or preservative mechanism. [6]

For a development programme, a combination-level result is still valuable. The first commercial objective may be a reliable system, without resolving every mechanism. Mechanistic attribution becomes more important when proposing a substitute component, extending the storage interval, or claiming ownership of a particular material effect. A change that appears minor in purchasing terms can alter the validated system.

4.3 Immediate extraction is not automatically the highest-yield reference

Mauvisseau and colleagues compared immediate extraction with four storage approaches after eight months, using fish communities in three mesocosms and ddPCR. Freshly extracted filters produced lower recovery than several stored-filter treatments. Freezing or buffer exposure might have assisted lysis, but the authors did not resolve that mechanism. Species-specific comparisons did not distinguish frozen filters, Longmire, and Sarkosyl significantly. The three species measurements within a sample are not independent field replicates. This study warns against interpreting greater recovery after storage as direct proof of superior molecular protection. [7]

A VARUNÉ comparison should therefore consider two questions: did the treatment preserve the original molecular material, and did it make that material easier to extract or measure? Both outcomes could be useful. Their distinction matters for extrapolation: an extraction aid may improve one assay whilst damaging a longer molecule or an unrelated downstream function. A favourable final signal alone cannot decide between those explanations.

4.4 Preservation differences can be practically unimportant

Dully and colleagues compared preservation-solution treatment with freezing of coastal marine sediments from locations affected by different stressors. Their primary abstract reports highly congruent extraction efficiency, bacterial community profiles, and diversity measures, with similar information for environmental management. Complete methods were not available for this

assessment, so the report does not infer broad equivalence margins or universal interchangeability. The case nevertheless provides a necessary counterweight: a change in preservation need not produce a consequential ecological difference. [8]

This matters commercially. If an established method already supports the customer's decision, a new material needs an advantage such as reliability, logistics, cost, or compatibility that the customer values. The existence of methodological complexity does not prove an unmet product need.

4.5 A real autonomous mission separates quantity from interpretation

Preston and colleagues collected 60 samples, including eight controls, during a 4,200-km, 29-day autonomous surface-vessel transit. Ambient onboard storage produced lower recoverable DNA and specific target concentrations than matched material flash-frozen and stored in a laboratory, whilst COI biodiversity was similar across the compared storage conditions. This is direct mission evidence that quantitative recovery and a community-level endpoint can diverge. It does not establish preservation of every rare taxon, long DNA fragment, or functional gene cluster. [9]

Hendricks and colleagues independently demonstrated an automated marine sampler with parallel conventional collection in Bedford Basin. Their abstract reports correlated representative sequence counts and similar captured microbial communities. Correlation supports feasibility but does not establish absence of systematic quantitative bias or equivalence for every endpoint. The primary full text could not be reliably retrieved here, so numerical operating claims beyond the abstract are not used. [10]

Together these studies identify a credible place for component research: explaining which conclusions remain dependable under an autonomous mission's storage and handling constraints. They do not establish that VARUNÉ has a solution or that the existing teams need a new one.

Table 2 Contrasting findings and the question they leave open

Evidence	What the comparison supports	Question for a proposed component
Hinlo and Majaneva [4,5]	Detection and community endpoints can rank workflows differently	Which endpoint defines acceptance?
Bizzozzero [6]	Filter, storage, and time interact in a marine workflow	Does substitution preserve the whole system's performance?
Mauvisseau [7]	Recovery after storage can exceed immediate extraction	Protection, improved extraction, or both?
Dully [8]	Alternative methods may preserve similar management information	Is there a valued practical improvement?
Preston [9]	Lower molecular recovery can coexist with similar biodiversity estimates	Which downstream conclusions remain valid?

5 Quantifying the distinction without overstating the model

5.1 Recovery is endpoint specific

$$R_k = \frac{Q_{k, \text{test}}/V_{\text{test}}}{Q_{k, \text{reference}}/V_{\text{reference}}}$$

Equation 1. Operational recovery ratio for endpoint k.

Here Q is the total measured amount of endpoint k recovered from an aliquot, and V is the original environmental sample volume. For a target assay, Q may be estimated gene copies and V litres; both numerator and denominator then have units of copies per litre. R is dimensionless. This is a standard ratio applied here, not a new biological model. It requires comparable calibration, defined extraction volumes, and a positive reference measurement. Values below detection must be handled as censored observations rather than replaced automatically with zero.

If k is total DNA, the result says nothing by itself about a particular target. If k is a marker-gene estimate, it does not automatically estimate organisms per litre. A ratio above one can reflect recovery, inhibition relief, extraction differences, or reference losses. The comparison becomes interpretable only when those alternatives are considered.

5.2 Representation has a denominator problem

McLaren, Willis, and Callahan modelled protocol bias as taxon-specific multiplicative efficiencies and tested it using defined bacterial communities. Their work shows why normalisation can create misleading changes in relative abundance and why suitable calibration may help. Applying the model to a different matrix requires testing its assumptions; the study does not provide correction factors for polar seawater. [11]

$$y_i = \frac{e_i x_i}{\sum_j e_j x_j}$$

Equation 2. Multiplicative measurement bias expressed as relative composition, adapted from McLaren and colleagues [11].

The x values are true relative abundances in a defined reference, e values are dimensionless relative measurement efficiencies, and y values are observed proportions. All terms are dimensionless. The relationship assumes the relevant effects can be approximated by multiplicative efficiencies and ignores contamination, stochastic read sampling, and changing efficiency across matrices. It must not be presented as a complete physical description.

An illustrative calculation makes the risk concrete. Suppose a constructed reference contains two targets in equal proportions. A workflow recovers them with efficiencies 0.8 and 0.4, giving an observed composition of approximately 0.67 and 0.33. Improving only the first efficiency to 1.0 increases total recovery but changes the observed composition to approximately 0.71 and 0.29. More recovered material has increased distortion of the known ratio. These are hypothetical values, not VARUNÉ observations.

The implication is not that higher recovery is undesirable. It is that recovery and representation should be assessed together when the decision depends on composition. A calibration established

for a constructed mixture may fail when natural particles, inhibitors, or fragment distributions differ. The validation domain belongs beside the correction.

5.3 Repeated detection helps only within its assumptions

$$P(\text{at least one detection}) = 1 - (1 - p)^n$$

Equation 3. Detection probability for independent, identical trials conditional on target presence.

Here p is the probability of detection in one defined trial and n is the number of trials; all terms are dimensionless. The equation follows from the complement of all trials failing. It assumes independence and constant p , conditions often violated when replicates share collection losses, extraction inhibition, or a common contaminated batch.

Illustratively, $p = 0.5$ and three independent trials give 0.875. Three PCR repeats of an extract from which the target was never recovered cannot repair the collection failure. The proposal should therefore distinguish independent collection replication from extraction replication and assay replication. Increasing technical repeats can be useful, but it cannot be used to inflate the number of independent environmental observations.

5.4 Mission economics should count interpretable samples

$$C_{\text{accepted}} = \frac{C_{\text{collection}} + C_{\text{storage}} + C_{\text{analysis}} + C_{\text{repeat}}}{N_{\text{accepted}}}$$

Equation 4. Accounting cost per sample meeting a predeclared decision standard.

Costs share one currency and accounting period; N is the number of samples accepted for the defined use, giving currency per accepted sample. This is an accounting identity, not a validated economic model. It requires nonzero N and clear treatment of shared platform costs. It excludes wider benefits unless they are explicitly valued elsewhere.

This denominator discourages a cheap but unreliable consumable and also discourages needless optimisation of an already adequate assay. Acceptance must be defined before seeing results. If a preservation change improves yield but creates more rejected community profiles or repeat analyses, its purchase price is an incomplete economic comparison.

6 Varun analysis of the connected evidence

6.1 Preserve a conclusion rather than maximise an isolated signal

My proposed interpretation is that preservation development should begin with a permissible conclusion: for example, “this workflow supports a specified community comparison within an agreed tolerance”. The development target then becomes the evidence needed to defend that conclusion. This reverses the usual temptation to select an attractive material first and search for an application afterwards.

The contribution is a practical synthesis of established measurement principles applied to candidate development. It does not establish novelty over every existing quality framework. Its value would be demonstrated if it changes experimental selection, prevents an invalid inference, or reduces the work needed to decide whether a component is useful.

6.2 Separate rescue of the sample from rescue of the assay

McKee and colleagues evaluated dilution and post-extraction purification in 21 inhibited environmental samples. The study addresses the fact that amplification inhibition can impair interpretation even after DNA is recovered. Its primary abstract supports the need for inhibition assessment; this report does not rank the treatments without complete results. [12]

For a candidate material, the decisive issue is where the effect occurs. If benefit disappears after equalising inhibition, the material may be an assay-compatibility aid. If independent molecular integrity improves but target detection does not, the assay may be insensitive to the preserved property. If neither changes, a larger total signal may be irrelevant. These are proposed interpretations to be tested, not diagnoses of existing VARUNÉ material.

6.3 A clean negative control does not represent every contamination route

Salter and colleagues experimentally showed that reagent and laboratory DNA can dominate low-biomass measurements and vary between batches. Their findings also demonstrate why samples processed in a structured order can acquire a misleading biological pattern. Environmental taxa can overlap with contaminants, so an indiscriminate taxon blacklist is insufficient. [13]

For autonomous missions, the author's inference is that blanks should reflect different boundaries: the material before deployment, the fluid path, storage, extraction, and the analytical run. A clean reagent blank cannot by itself rule out carryover between environmental samples. Conversely, an organism detected in a blank is not automatically absent from the environment. Interpretation needs the pattern across controls and samples, the intended claim, and uncertainty.

6.4 Monitoring and discovery may require separate aliquots

Rich and colleagues changed a functional metagenomic library-construction strategy and recovered enzyme activities missed by their standard-library comparison. The result concerns expression and screening accessibility; it is not evidence for a superior preservative. [14] Together with the textbook distinction between representation and expression, it means that preserving a marker does not prove preservation of discovery potential. [3]

The proposed operational response is to evaluate whether one aliquot can meet both purposes before forcing a common workflow. Separate allocation may cost more at collection but avoid an unusable archive later. This should be a measured trade-off, not a presumption that every mission needs duplicate sampling.

7 A bounded VARUNÉ Bio study proposal

The proposed initial project is one compatibility study for one marine sampling partner and one primary downstream decision. It would compare an established workflow with a precisely defined component change. The first objective is to determine whether the change produces useful information or operational benefit; mechanism work follows only where it changes the decision.

Independent source collections should be distributed across the treatments, with collection occasion and matrix recorded. Storage duration, temperature history, extraction batch, and analytical run should be balanced or modelled rather than allowed to align perfectly with treatment. A pilot should estimate the variance that matters to the intended conclusion. A qualified statistician should set the

replication and equivalence or superiority margins from that variance and the acceptable decision error. This report supplies no defensible universal sample size.

The study should retain separate endpoint families: target recovery, inhibition, composition where relevant, and integrity appropriate to any planned discovery use. The primary endpoint and acceptable losses in secondary endpoints should be declared in advance. A finding of no statistically significant difference is not automatically evidence of equivalence. Agreement should be judged against prespecified limits and uncertainty.

Table 3 Proposed decisions and discriminating evidence

Question	Comparison needed	Decision consequence
Does the component preserve useful information?	Candidate versus established workflow for the declared endpoint	Continue only if the required conclusion remains supportable
Is the apparent benefit an extraction or assay effect?	Independent integrity and inhibition checks alongside recovery	Narrow the claim to the mechanism actually supported
Does improvement generalise within the intended use?	Independent collections and relevant matrix variation	Restrict the validated domain or investigate the interaction
Is the field system compatible?	Material, fluid-path, blank, and handling assessment	Reject or redesign an operationally unreliable component
Is the benefit worth obtaining?	Cost per accepted sample and avoided rework	Stop if no valued net improvement remains

Analysis should preserve failed samples and failed conditions in the record. Excluding an awkward matrix after observing poor performance would redefine the application and must be disclosed. A successful early comparison should be followed by a blinded or independently executed confirmation in the actual workflow. It should not become a claim that preservation works across environments.

A second research question can arise without opening another laboratory programme: does storage age confound geography in a moving sampler? Early samples may remain onboard longer than late samples, so biological location and preservation history can align. Where this applies, the proposed analysis would use mission controls and handling metadata to assess whether an apparent transect pattern could be explained by storage. This is a hypothesis for design scrutiny, not an assertion that the cited transit's ecological findings are artefacts.

8 Useful contributions to existing programmes

The cited autonomous studies provide credible settings for a bounded contribution. MBARI-associated ESP work and teams developing compact automated samplers could, in principle, use component compatibility evidence, preservation controls, or an interpretation study. No interest, unmet requirement, budget, collaboration, or permission from those organisations has been confirmed. [9,10]

A first deliverable could be a partner-specific evidence package linking sample provenance, storage history, recovered endpoints, and the conclusion each sample supports. A successful package might justify a paid development continuation, qualified consumable supply, or a licensed analytical method. A shared research award is another possible structure, subject to actual eligibility and a named programme need; this report does not identify an open funding call.

For polar genome collections or Antarctic missions, the same logic applies, but the evidence reviewed here is predominantly non-polar. Transfer to polar water, sediments, ice-associated samples, or prolonged deployment remains a research question. The ecological label “polar” does not remove differences in matrix, logistics, or intended inference. A useful contribution may be analytical qualification of existing samples rather than participation in an expedition.

Ownership should attach to a defined contribution: a documented method, validated compatibility data, a reproducible material, or an agreed improvement. Partner data and sampling assets remain subject to their actual terms. Publication of this review does not establish access, ownership, or a licence. The active laboratory commitment remains one funded, qualified programme rather than a separate project for every possible mission.

9 Limitations and contrary interpretations

The strongest objection is that experienced molecular teams already know preservation is workflow dependent. That is correct. The report's proposed value lies in applying the distinction to a specific component decision and quantifying the evidence required, not in claiming invention of good analytical practice. Without a partner problem, the framework is useful scholarship but not yet a commercial asset.

Another objection is that demanding multiple endpoints increases cost. The response should be proportionate: measure only the properties needed to establish the intended use and protect against consequential alternative explanations. A narrow detection service need not validate every ecological or discovery application. Overqualification can waste resources just as underqualification can invalidate a result.

The present source selection is incomplete and vulnerable to availability and selection bias. Several primary papers were assessed through abstracts or selected sections. No raw-data reanalysis establishes effect sizes, equivalence, or reproducibility across laboratories. The equations simplify complex systems, and the proposed study remains uncoded and unfunded.

10 Conclusion

Preservation should be judged by whether it retains the evidence required for a specified conclusion. Published comparisons show that greater recovery, stable community estimates, and useful mission performance can separate. They also show that established alternatives may already preserve the information a customer needs. The defensible VARUNÉ Bio opportunity is therefore a bounded contribution that resolves a documented failure or uncertainty in one workflow. Its first proof would be a decision that becomes more reliable, economical, or operationally feasible whilst remaining scientifically interpretable. A new material would earn its place through that result.

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Authorship and research provenance

Varun Sharma is the sole author and approved this edition for release on 28 October 2026. No new experimental data are reported; published findings remain attributable to the cited investigators.

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This report shares concepts and sources with the five companion reports dated 28 October 2026; it presents a distinct literature analysis.