



**Natural England/Marine Management  
Organisation project:**

**MMO 1277: Study into the engagement  
experiences and opportunities for fishers,  
fisheries management and marine conservation  
staff**

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## 1. Introduction

Natural England (NE) and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) jointly commissioned Anszu Action and Let's Co-organise to understand this work. It focuses on two English case studies: Cromer in Norfolk and Hastings in East Sussex. MMO Researchers also reached out to wider MMO frontline staff to enable a "compare and contrast" exercise to be undertaken.

### 1.1. The Objectives

Below are the objectives of this study and the questions we were asked to address:

1) Understand previous engagement mechanisms which are currently being/or have been utilised and identify examples of poor and good practice.

- What mechanisms have been used previously and why has/hasn't it worked?
- How do those who were involved in it feel about it (including those working in government/non-government organisations and fisheries stakeholders?)

2) Understand the dynamics and relationships between the MMO, the fishing industry/community and Natural England (NE) and other government agencies including the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCA) and Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

- How do relationships enable or hinder engagement and the potential for co-management?
- Map out dynamics both amongst the community and between the community and the MMO/NE as far as possible given the limitations of the reach of the data collection.
- Who held the power and did those involved feel they were able to influence/deem it to be genuine?

3) Provide recommendations about internalised behaviour and culture to the MMO based on perceptions data gathered from both the MMO/NE/other parts of government and suggestions on how to address any adverse practices that can be implemented by the MMO and NE or other parts of government.

- What structural or institutional and behavioural /cultural changes are recommended necessary?
- How can perceptions of agency staff of local fishers they come into contact with be understood?

### 1.2. Study structure

In objective 1, the authors review how the MMO, NE and the IFCA's engage with fishers and wider stakeholders and examples of good and less good practice. This section presents the opinions, insights, feelings, reflections and ideas of agency staff and fishers about engagement context, strategy, history, progress, methods, relationships, opportunities and barriers.

In objective 2, the authors review the engagement strategy and activity in each case study area through the lens of theories of power, to show in a practical way who holds power and why it can profoundly impact engagement choices and impact. Power maps are used to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of relationship dynamics between stakeholders.

In objective 3, attention turns to the organisational culture and priorities of Natural England and the Marine Management Organisation and how these characteristics impact both the strategic and operational choices made about engagement as well as its overall effectiveness.

The study concludes with findings, with key learning and recommendations for future action. Each objective is considered in turn, guided by the questions within each objective.

As the study was commissioned by NE and the MMO, the primary focus of the recommendations is on those organisations. However, interviews with the IFCA staff formed a significant part of the study in both case study areas and hence the IFCA staff views are taken into account particularly in objectives 1 and 2.

## 2. Approach

This work enabled community organising skills and techniques to be applied to the three objectives. Staff from the local IFCA, NE and MMO teams together with fishers based in the ports of Cromer and Hastings were contacted. These predominantly belonged to the under 10 metre fleet with all fishers exhibiting site loyalty.

Ansuz Action and Let's Co-organise gathered information, perceptions, views, and insights into engagement. Participants were asked questions that explored their experiences of engaging with fisheries agencies and of fisheries management together with their ideas for change. The aim was to build trust as an outside party, listen deeply and gently challenge where appropriate. These conversations and our observations of the dynamics between agencies and local people formed the basis of this study as well as, an analysis of the power dynamics and relationships between the players and the impact of these dynamics on engagement.

Community organising is not an academic research method, it is a community engagement process and practice that utilises deep listening and nuanced, powerful questioning to build trust and draw out ideas and viewpoints. This study used active listening and power analysis to identify the root causes of the issues mentioned which are part of a community organising framework. More information on this methodology is provided in Appendix 1.

The case study approach allows for insights to be drawn from two areas, which can be compared and contrasted. Both were familiar to the commissioners of the study and each provided context-specific barriers to and opportunities for engagement. A qualitative study of engagement methods and relationship dynamics in two areas was taken.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Methods

#### Listening conversations

Conversations were arranged on Zoom or by telephone with seventeen individuals (seven Cromer and ten Hastings) and six groups (four Cromer and two Hastings). Group interviews ranged from two people to five people. A total of thirty-three people participated in this part of the study. The conversations had some characteristics of a semi-structured survey, however, the questions and the way in which they were asked, followed a 'listening script' format which is more open than a

conventional interview or survey - encouraging and giving space to respondents to share their feelings and gathering ideas about solutions. The core listening script is in Appendix two. In real-time, the script also contained prompts and additional 'why' and 'can you explain that in more detail' questions to obtain nuanced and clear responses. The nature of the open questioning techniques used enabled us to gather both information about the work and relationships of the participants and also learn about the wider context of life in Cromer and North Norfolk.

Everyone spoken to was asked questions around the same themes in the same order, although question phrasing was tailored for the different groups and prompting questions varied according to how respondents answered. It was important that interviewees felt comfortable, in control and understood the purpose of the conversations - the aim was for respondents to feel that their contribution and experience were highly valued.

During the one-to-one conversations, the role of the community organisers became facilitative. They guided respondents through the questions using their own responses to deepen the conversation and active listening tools such as reflecting back to seek clarification. They listened to understand rather than to comment or pass opinion.

### **Written survey**

MMO researchers issued a written survey to wider nationally based agency staff to build a more detailed picture of agency culture and draw out a broader range of good practice examples. This was sent to a total of 29 agency staff, 15 officers from five MMO local offices and 14 regional staff who work with fisheries for NE. However, only six of these staff completed the written survey and the data collected was of limited value as answers were very brief. Therefore, only one quote from the written survey was used in the study, and the responses did not add any variation to the findings from the case studies.

## **3.2 Recruitment of Participants**

Participants were:

- Agency staff from regional teams at the IFCA, the MMO and NE. For the MMO, this was limited to the enforcement teams and for NE, it was members of the regional advisory teams;
- Inshore fishers (including vessel owners, skippers, and crew) and members of the wider fishing community (including fisher association leaders and community leaders).

A form of the snowballing method was followed to recruit participants. Initial participant details were provided by NE and Defra. These were followed up and interviews were arranged. Those participants were then asked to recommend other potential participants. In Hastings, contact was also made through a local community organiser who was already known to the authors and knew some fishers from previous work and who was able therefore to connect us. This led to a less formal introduction to people and meant that a range of workers involved in land-based supportive activities such as marketing as well as full-time fishers were spoken to. In Cromer, connections were also made with members of the fishing community through an introduction from a local project worker. However, participant selection was not random and had an acknowledged bias both in the initial selection and in the recommendations made. The aim was not to achieve the same participant profile in both case study areas.

All interviews were carried out between March 22nd and April 9<sup>th</sup> 2022.

#### 4. Hastings and Cromer: Overview and context

##### Hastings

Hastings is a quota-dependent inshore beach-launching fishery made up of approximately 30 vessels, which predominantly belong to the under 10-meter sector. These vessels work seasonally and whilst diversifying their catch, mainly use static gear to target cod and flatfish. They have been adversely impacted by ICES Area 7d quota restrictions and have been unable to take advantage of the quota available in neighbouring 4c ICES rectangle due to limited vessel capacity. Their situation has also been drastically impacted by the implementation of discarding regulations, given the nature of their gear and the highly mixed fishery of the east English Channel in which they operate. They have dabbled with diversification, trialling fishing for crab but this has not been possible due to a lack of local relevant grounds and to avoid conflict by moving over to grounds already targeted by the Eastbourne fleet, with whom they have a very close relationship.

They are unique, in that they have spearheaded several nationally transformative projects including the judicial review and were the co-founders of both NUTFA (New Under Ten Fisherman's Association) and the community Producer Organisation (PO) project. The fleet is led by Hastings Fishermen's Protection Society (HFPS) who, in keeping with the political nature of their town, are active locally, and nationally, and creative and innovative in how they advocate for themselves and the conservation of their way of life. Many NGOs have engaged with this fishery including Greenpeace, New Economics Foundation, and others, who have supported the fishing community in their initiatives as they are considered a good example of sustainable low-impact fishing.

HFPS is led by two dominant voices, a secretary, and an association lead. The society elects 12 representatives that work with the lead to organise and represent them in local and national spaces. These two main contacts are the first port of call when contacting the society and they manage the interaction between some of the agencies/organisations and their members.

Open questioning helped us to understand the context in which people were working. This work was done during a period of lockdown in the COVID-19 pandemic and following the UK's exit from Europe. People spoke of how the influx of people moving from London was leading to a lack of affordable housing and a loss of income meaning fishers were living in their huts on the beach. There were problems accessing universal credit and government support schemes as this required internet access and data. Agency staff knew fishers that had lost family members to COVID. In addition, the MMO Office, which had previously been rented from HFPS was being relocated and local people didn't understand why.

##### Cromer

Cromer is a shellfish (non-quota) beach and harbour-based inshore fishery comprising circa 40, 10-metre and under vessels that predominantly target brown crab and lobster. Their key fishing grounds overlap with chalk beds which were designated as part of the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) in 2016. Management of the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ includes a historic no-trawl zone, pushed for by fishermen to protect the chalk. In the summer of 2019, NE received reports that the chalk reef was being damaged as a consequence of the potting activities. Subsequently, NE took their own investigative dive surveys forward. The findings of this work were published in December 2020. This prompted the IFCA to initiate discussions concerning management measures. Options included an emergency byelaw which will enable pots to be managed through a permitting scheme.

Fishermen have been extremely resistant to the MCZ since it started being discussed in 2010. Attempts to encourage co-management of the site (between fishermen, the community, the IFCA and other agencies) have been made by the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) through a project called Agents of Change (AoC), which has been working in this area since 2018. Key stakeholders include a retired fisherman's wife who acts as a local community facilitator. Overall, this fishing community does not operate cooperatively in terms of markets or representation and there are at least three associations in this area that fishers belong to.

Participants interviewed for this study spoke about the rise in second homes and the cancellation of major tourist events as a result of the COVID restrictions, both of which had a detrimental effect on the local economy and community. In both areas, agency staff talked of the impact of lockdown and restrictions on the consistency of relationships with fishers and the challenges of cold calling to check in with individuals, especially for those relatively new to their roles without fully formed face-to-face relationships with local people.

### **4.3 Limitations**

The study's primary limitation was that Covid restrictions prevented people from visiting case study areas in person, which can be expected to have resulted in a more opportunistic respondent profile and a broader range of respondents. Online conference facilities excluded some older fishers.

The relatively small written survey sample size limited the application of the findings and recommendations beyond the case study areas. There are known omissions in the samples in each area - in Hastings there was only one NE participant. In Cromer, there was an influential fisher that was not interviewed, although that individual was referred to by others in conversations.

## **5. Findings**

### **5.1. Objective 1: Engagement approaches**

#### **Context**

Analysis of all the transcripts in both areas identified six key themes and distinguishing features of the overall context and climate in which engagement was carried out.

- A historical legacy of mistrust of agencies by fishers
- The cumulative impact of this mistrust
- The complexity of the inshore fishing industry
- The multiple roles held by the MMO and IFCA officers
- Understanding and empathy on all sides
- Attitudes around bureaucracy and paperwork

These themes both shape and impact the appropriateness and efficacy of engagement tools and techniques carried out by agency staff in Hastings and Cromer.

Most agency staff spoken to in Cromer and Hastings are aware that enforcement cannot be delivered in a heavy-handed way and that compliance is achieved through longer-term cultural and behavioural change. Accordingly, both the local IFCA and MMO teams were found to take an

'educate and engage' approach, which aims to enable fishing activity to continue in a sustainable way. However, some non-frontline staff also acknowledged that commercial fishers and fisheries management seek entirely different goals which can be incompatible and that compromise, therefore, was not a desirable goal.

### **Methods of engagement**

All the following engagement methods were identified by agency staff:

- Relationship building via face-to-face and one-to-one contact by walking around the area
- Workshops
- Online and mail consultation direct from agency rather than individual staff although staff encourage fishers to complete surveys and respond.
- Consultation meetings
- Attend events, AGMs, societies and sit on boards and other bodies
- Phone lines and calls
- Surveys
- Forums and public meetings.

There is a recognition that engagement is more effective if it:

- is part of an overall strategy
- is proactive
- deploys mixed methods to reach a range of people
- is flexible
- sets realistic, pragmatic goals
- is designed to achieve the overall goal/s.

Individual relationship building and face-to-face communications are recognised emphatically by all agency staff in both Hastings and Cromer as the most effective way of building and maintaining trust (although not all of them use this method). There was agreement on the effectiveness of relationship building for establishing mutuality. One-to-one conversations when walking around the area are the foundation of the officer engagement role and have multiple uses beyond getting to know people and building trust, for example, to give out information, answer questions, build rapport, consult informally, and identify current preoccupations.

Time spent walking around and talking to stakeholders is both opportunistic and more strategic. Taking a proactive approach helps to get a sense of prevailing issues and where information/support is needed. More strategic engagement is undertaken with a specific intention in mind while more opportunistic engagement has a more open agenda. Officers from the IFCA and the MMO reported that some of the most valuable interactions are when they listen to stakeholders without having a set agenda.

While one-to-one relationship building is valued because agency staff can see the benefit to building trust, they also feel that it suits the privacy, personality and cultural needs of the fishers, and addresses some of the complex community dynamics.

Fishers and members of the fishing community were also emphatic that regular (daily) contact and relationship building was their preferred way to build trust. They were positive about opportunities to talk and get to know each other better. One-to-one conversation can also feel counterintuitive as



it reaches fewer people but the value is clear. However, it can be time consuming, especially when there are complex issues in play.

There is a recognition among agency staff that they can never achieve perfect relationships with everyone – they all had a story of characters who after many years of work still have no relationship with. However, putting in the engagement work consistently and regularly means that other fishers can also advocate on the officers' behalf. IFCA staff in one of the interviews talked positively about the high levels of trust, familiarity, and informality they have with some fishers. However, this trust remains fragile.

### **Other important engagement methods**

All agency staff supported a mixed methods approach to engagement – for example, email, direct mail, phone calls, consultations, informal drop-ins, social media, and posters – to reach as many relevant people as possible. This approach has evolved in response to historically low levels of engagement and sparse responses to consultations.

Over the last ten years agency staff have gravitated away from large meetings and towards small gatherings, workshops and drop-in sessions. There was a history of large meetings (i.e. 50 fishers and a panel of 'experts') but the feedback was poor: meetings were dominated by very robust, often heated, discussion, and became a free for all; and quieter fishers were shouted down or blocked from speaking. It was noted that on the occasions where large meetings had been successful, a strong and competent chairperson was what made the difference.

Smaller gatherings can take various forms:

- A drop in at the beach to look at sea charts and discuss fishing management;
- Cabaret style small groups responding to set questions;
- As part of a wider consultation process – e.g. Catch Recording App
- Surgeries – seven a day, one hour long, a maximum of five fishers at each

These formats prove effective for fishers to explain their needs and views and learn new processes without interruption and contradiction. Although fishers will always prefer one-to-ones, the smaller groups do allow for focus and discussion in a calmer and more supportive environment.

### **Consultations**

Fishers reported that agency consultations often felt “phony”, making them wary of participating in them. Fishers unanimously felt that they were asked for their views too late in any consultation process, that they were not consulted as equals, and their views were not respected or listened to. Agency staff admitted that the scientific language, jargon and format of the written reports issued are not accessible. Agency staff often translate reports and consultations to stakeholders.

Fishers and the fishing community also raised this issue. Some fishers have only basic levels of education and qualifications and therefore struggle with technical reports and language. Coupled with their physical lifestyle and heavy workload means sitting down to read length documentation is difficult.

## **5.2. Objective 2: Understand the power dynamics and relationships**

It is important to explore the themes summarised in Objective 1 through a power lens. Questions on power open new ways for staff to understand the impact of their actions. This macrolevel view of local dynamics helps to explain issues from a different perspective and offers a new way of finding solutions.

Power dynamics have been analysed using two distinct approaches. Firstly, to analyse the power dynamics between the agencies and the fishing industry, a theoretical model of power (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2007), often used in community organising, was chosen to reveal power dynamics based on the data gathered in the study. This model analyses power in terms of who has control and influence over resources and decision-making, in particular, the control of material, human, intellectual and financial resources.

Secondly, to analyse the power dynamics between actors, power maps were developed for each case study, with a written summary of what they reveal (Figure 1 and 2). They have also been used to compare and contrast the power dynamics between them.

### **Control of material resources**

The sea is considered as part of 'the commons', meaning that it is regarded to be a natural resource which is not, for the most part, owned by particular individuals. Therefore, Government agencies have a statutory role to take action to protect this natural asset 'for the public good'. This creates a complex power dynamic in the context of inshore fisheries. The sea is the key material resource for the fishers. When we view power in this context, who controls the sea or the use of the sea holds the power. When the number of agencies with responsibility for the management and conservation of the sea are compared there is a clear imbalance of power between stakeholders and government agencies.

Although there is evidence of consultation and engagement with inshore fishers in policy and decision-making, fisheries stakeholders are just one group among a plethora of other stakeholders such as management and conservation organisations. While there will be some shared interests in relation to maintaining healthy seas, fishers struggle to have their specific interests heard above the competing interests of these organisations and other more organised interests, for example, energy companies. Fishers feel that rather than being viewed as partners in the conservation and management of fisheries, they are the subject of regulation and control.

For example, Cromer's fisheries partly exist within an MCZ which was designated in 2016. This designation by Government bodies such as the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), NE and Defra is managed by the MMO and the Eastern IFCA. Management of an MCZ can involve different measures depending on the identified needs of each site. There has been recent contention around possible evidence that contrary to historical understanding, potting (crab and lobster fishing) is causing some damage to the underwater chalk bed.

Under guidance from NE, the IFCA has reviewed current management arrangements to avoid further damage. The worst-case scenario for the Cromer fisheries is a precautionary closure of the fishery with a detrimental impact on the town's economy which relies on fishing and subsidiary businesses. The tension and uncertainty created by this dynamic have affected trust and relationships between the fishers and the management and conservation agencies.

However, there is some opportunity for inshore fishers to influence local policy and decision making around management and conservation through the governing committee of the IFCA (called "the authority"). This is composed of elected members from three county councils who fund it, officers

from NE, MMO and the Environment Agency (EA) and then eleven members nominated by the MMO with at least six commercial fishers from across the region including Cromer as well as others with coastal interests. So in relation to power, the IFCA committee is an 'invited space' which enables a level of participation in the decision-making process in relation to the management and conservation of the fishery. There are complicated speaking and voting rules on subjects where members might have an interest which can exclude members in certain discussions and decisions.

#### Control of Human resources

When analysing power dynamics and the control and influence over resources and decision-making, human resources mean the number of people within an industry or organisation and how they are organised. Large institutions have power because they have a workforce that they are able to organise within specific, often specialist roles. This is not the case with the inshore fisheries sector.

In Cromer, even though various fisherman's organisations exist, fishers are individual businesses in competition with each other. They do not have an organised power base or a representative body.

Although many of the agency staff interviewed acknowledged the lack of an organised power base, it was clear that partnership with or advocacy for the fishers is not part of their role. However, there are times when staff find the impartial approach a challenge and feel themselves treading a fine line which occasionally sees them on the side of the fishers. The diminishing numbers of fishers and their lack of organisation within the inshore fishing community has implications for fishers taking part in engagement programmes and informing and influencing decision-making. Participation in consultations and other organisation-led activities including membership of the IFCA authority board is done in fishers' own time, unpaid. Many fishers do not have the technical and literacy skills required to access these activities.

Another issue in relation to the control of human resources is that very few people are choosing to become fishers. As older fishers retire, the fleet will diminish and with it any power and influence that currently exists if younger generations do not enter the catching sector. This risks the loss of traditional and historical knowledge and experience of the sea, the seascape, the fishing grounds and the fish which is a vital part of the fishers' human resources.

Those interviewed identified various barriers to entry to being a fisher, a key one being cost. Regulation and legislation of the fishing industry require that new fishers must be trained and qualified in health and safety at sea. Certification comes at a cost to individual business owners with no assurances that new recruits will stay. The agencies do not share the issue of a diminishing workforce and have the resource to train young people in entry-level roles. Fishers in Hastings felt that working at the agencies was already a more attractive prospect and therefore they are competing with these organisations.

Agency staff also commented on issues of human resource in relation to their work, from staff turnover, to 'not enough people' leaving little time to focus on the engagement needed to do the work. Whilst this does not necessarily impact on who holds the power in this study, it does imply that staff do not feel they have power over decisions about staff levels or what is and is not prioritised in relation to engagement. This is important since it can hinder the building of relationships and trust between staff and fishers which in turn influences feelings of power and powerlessness, cooperation, and collaboration.

#### Control of financial resources

Some of the issues of control of human resources are related to financial resources and the different business models of the actors involved in the study. The organisations are mostly publicly funded while the fishers are small business owners who derive their income from demand and supply of their products. The organisations generally know in advance their budget for the coming year and organise resources accordingly. The fishers' income is dependent on many factors, most notably nature itself (sea state, weather, seasons, migration of fish) and relies on sales in the present and future. Their income is neither predictable nor secure.

The management and conservation of the fisheries in the form of regulation, compliance and enforcement often comes at a cost to the fishers. Participants gave examples of changes in regulations in relation to health and safety equipment, training requirements and additional licencing for which fishers incur costs, but without which their operation would not be compliant. Such regulation rarely improves productivity for the fishers and has a negative financial impact on them. Non-compliance can result in sanctions in the form of fines. Furthermore, MMO administers grant funding to local fishers. This dual identity with them as a law enforcer and grant giver is confusing and can undermine fishers.

### **Control of intellectual resources**

Intellectual resources are factors such as the gathering, production and dissemination of information and knowledge. In relation to power, it also involves who decides what counts as valid and reliable evidence and knowledge. It is an important consideration in this study, since many of the policies and decisions made by the agencies are based on scientific research and evidence. The resources to gather this evidence lie with the agencies and interpretation of this evidence is used to inform regulation and marine management decisions and actions. The study found that evidence or information that is seen as anecdotal or informal is discounted by organisations such as NE.

The implication here is that the experiential and historical knowledge that the fishers have of the marine environment is readily devalued and not factored into the policy and decision making process. It is unsurprising therefore that many participants from the fishing community reported that they are not heard and they feel powerless.

And yet, many of the participants from all the agencies in the study, particularly those working 'on the ground' acknowledged the fishers' knowledge of the fishing grounds, of the fish, and of changing fishing methods which comes from working experience and, in the case of many of the older fishers, is knowledge passed down across many generations.

This contention over knowledge and who holds the power creates tension between the fishers and the enforcement officers on the ground. There is no onus on new officers to have any knowledge or experience in the fishing industry and so they arrive on the beach in their enforcement role to inspect a catch and the fishers find themselves having to teach them how to distinguish between male and female shellfish and how to handle them in order to measure them. Alongside this, some participants spoke about examples of where fishers have felt disrespected when organisations have sent highly qualified workers, with sound knowledge of their subject but with no knowledge or experience of fishing to meetings with them. This demonstrates the bias towards science over lived experience.

This preference for academic or scientific knowledge and language from agencies is also reflected in communications and engagement activities from the agencies and puts fishers at a potential disadvantage.

As well as in the format of communications, the regulation of fisheries is introducing more technical tools and solutions, which puts the ageing community of fishers at a disadvantage. They do not need smartphones, apps and the internet to actually fish but find themselves needing these tools to maintain compliance. Not only that, but many consultations are also done via email and online forms and information is communicated via social media.

Within the fishing community, there is one area where the control of information and knowledge can give power to individual fishers. Long-standing knowledge about where to fish is not readily shared between fishers – related to financial resources, knowledge of the fishing ground gives a competitive advantage among the fishers.

In relation to control of material, human, financial and intellectual resources, the management and conservation agencies hold the power. Although there are examples of resistance from the fishing industry, such as lack of participation in consultations and other forms of engagement, rather than this building power, this can lead to the introduction of policies or tools which place them at a further disadvantage as their perspective and input is not taken into account.

While staff felt there was support for the fishing industry from the wider community, the general public and local and national politicians, this seems not to influence the power dynamics in the day-to-day life of the fishers. Ultimately the power lies with those who have control over the use of the sea, which creates uncertainty for the fishers who, without the resources or power base, are unable to participate meaningfully in the decision-making process around their key material resource.

### **Power maps**

The power relationship maps were created using Fisher's (2011) approach created to map conflict<sup>2</sup>. While they do map conflict, they are mainly a way of showing how the different local players relate to one another and describing the relationships between them.

#### *Hastings Power Map*

The Hastings map describes our interpretation of the relationships between the organisations and groups mentioned during the Hastings focused conversations.

Key elements to note when viewing the power map:

- There is a dominant clash/conflict between individuals in the MMO and the Hastings Fisherman's Protection Society (HFPS)
- There is conflict between the MMO and all fishers spoken to
- The IFCA has a strong relationship with the fleet despite the fact fishers have no representation on the IFCA committee and that they have regulatory power. This is down to the relationships and trust built by IFCA staff.

There is a complex and disconnected relationship between some fishers, the HPFS, other land workers and the people that run the small shops on the seafront. HPFS holds the power as it maintains relationships with organisations, the media, and local politicians but as fishers are all different, their relationships with HPFS varies. Some felt like HPFS controls the fleet too much. This is then exacerbated by groups using HFPS as 'the voice' of the community.

Other factors:

- The University of Brighton (UoB) has a very positive relationship with the fleet and lots of resources but not much influence or connection with the agencies and has recently closed its Hastings campus.
- Fishers didn't mention NE at all and the NE staff interviewed felt like they hadn't had much contact at all with fishers.
- The Hastings Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) seemed to be a space where the fishers and organisations collaborated and built positive relationships so was included in the map as a mechanism for collaboration.

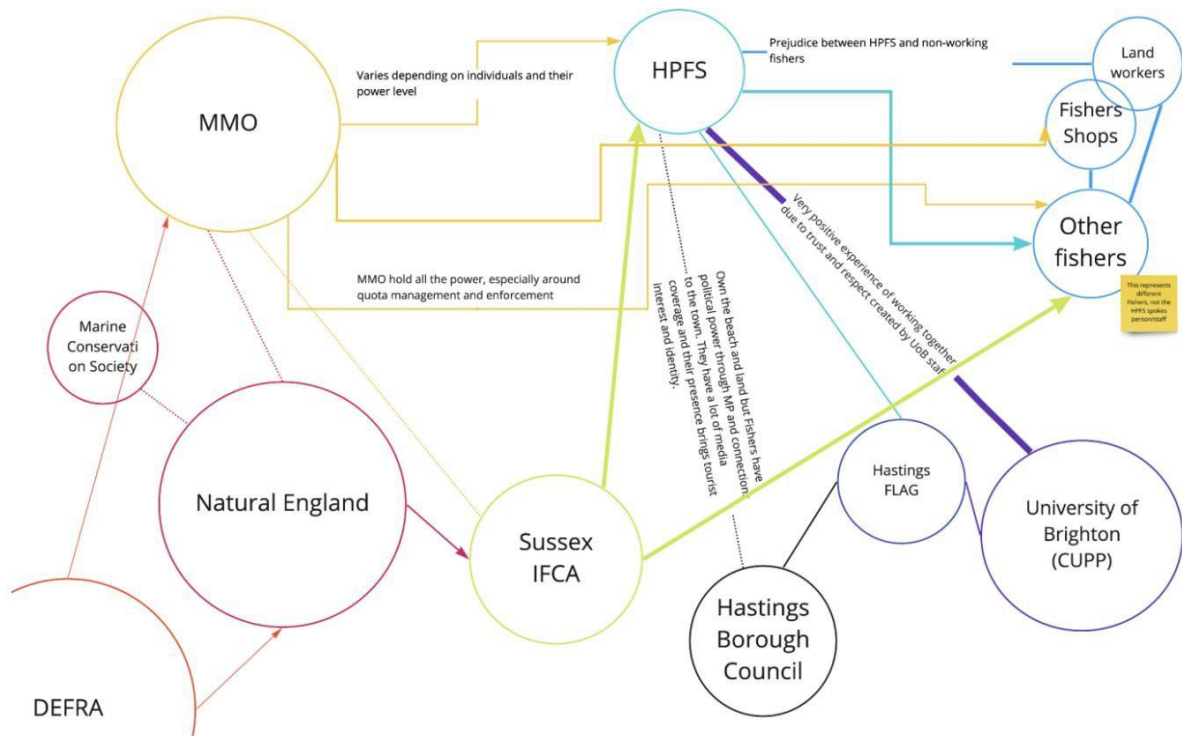


Figure 1 Hastings Power Map

Cromer Power Map

The Cromer power relationships map is an interpretation of the relationships between the organisations and groups mentioned during the Cromer focused conversations.

Key elements to note when viewing the power map:

- Conflict/tension between NE and the fishing industry
- Conflict/tension between MCS and SeaSearch and the fishing industry
- The IFCA has improving relationships with at least two Cromer fishers on the authority committee
- There is a complex network of relationships within the fishing industry

Other factors:

- Fishers felt it was often difficult to distinguish between the role of the IFCA and MMO officers on the ground, although there was greater clarity in relation to licencing of boats
- NE were viewed negatively by fishers and wider community in relation to the MCZ

- The North Norfolk FLAG was not viewed as a satisfactory experience due to MMO management of the funds.

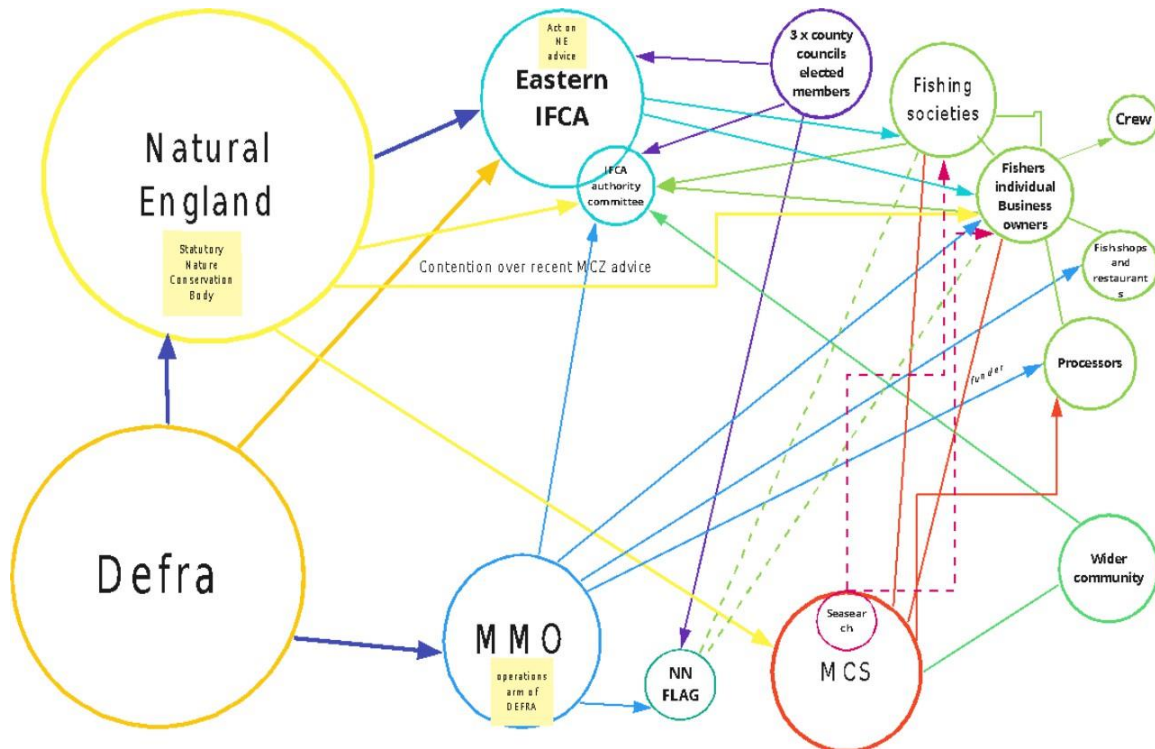


Figure 2 Cromer power map

In comparing these maps, we see how each local context is different. How power is perceived depends upon the type of involvement agencies have with the fleet, no matter what kind of control of material and resources they may have. Both maps show power is mainly exerted *over* fishers (see the direction of arrows) and there isn't much power sharing *with* the community.

### Co-management potential

Throughout this study, there are numerous examples of how relationships and trust play a key role in enabling or hindering engagement. To consider the potential co-management of fisheries, addressing the issues raised around engagement would be the first step in moving towards a co-management arrangement. But more than this, the agencies who are driving the co-management agenda will need to consider the examples of the imbalance of power described in relation to resources and decision-making as factors that might get in the way of co-management.

In relation to co-management, agency staff were asked "Should fishers be more actively involved in marine management?" The key points raised in response are shown in the table 1.

Table 1 Co-management enablers and blockers

Factors that enable co-management	Factors that hinder co-management
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<p>There is a strong will for fishers to be more actively involved in fisheries management.</p>	<p>Currently no clear definition of co-management across agencies.</p> <p>Issues of public duty and legal oversight.</p> <p>Issues of equity and diversity in representation from the fishing industry.</p> <p>Issues of human and financial resources (time and money).</p> <p>Issues of a hierarchy of knowledge - theory (scientific research) vs practice (working experience).</p> <p>The current reality of engagement and relationships with the fishing industry.</p>
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### 5.3. Objective 3: Internal agency behaviour and culture

Objective three questions are answered using information and perceptions provided by twenty-two agency staff in Cromer and Hastings. In addition, there were six responses to the written survey from five MMO and one NE staff.

#### Institutional and behavioural/cultural changes

The observations and suggestions made in this section are based solely on interviews with the case study staff and are focused on the issues raised and encountered in those areas. In order to make fully informed recommendations a much wider and more focused study would be required. The study does not assume that these issues are organisation-wide and that there are not examples of best practice elsewhere in MMO and NE.

#### MMO Valuing and supporting frontline staff

Both agency staff and fishers themselves emphasise that animosity from fishers is not personal - it is the organisation behind the person that creates the ill feeling and behaviour (although individual personalities do sometimes play a part).

In interviews frontline staff frequently spoke of the challenges they encounter out in the field in their engagement duties. These range from never really knowing what to expect from the people they meet and having to mentally prepare for that uncertainty, to experiencing different manifestations of negative behaviour. Staff are routinely ignored, shouted at, and on the receiving end of bullying-like behaviour.

This study acknowledges the tough job that MMO frontline staff have. The very long and chequered history of the UK fishing industry, the lack of homogeneity of fishers and their own very complex relationships with each other, the rapidly changing landscape of policy and the fact that fishers have a hard life makes engagement work extremely tough.



Given that for MMO frontline staff engagement is at least 50% of their job, there seems to be both an undervaluing of the engagement element of the role and an under-investment in training for face-to-face work from senior management. Front line work where negativity and abuse exists can be very stressful and potentially damaging to individuals – despite assertions that it isn't taken personally. Comments about staff turnover, pay and other conditions suggest that frontline work in fisheries is not sufficiently valued within the organisation. Frontline engagement work should be regarded by MMO as a specialist role in its own right within the organisation, rather than simply a steppingstone to other roles.

#### A development review of the officer and senior officer roles

Current MMO staff have learned admirably and effectively on the job and would have very helpful insights to share on the skills and knowledge needed to best fulfil the marine officer role. A programme of continued professional development would be an effective and much needed way to support front-line staff to develop in their roles and enable them to add specialist engagement knowledge and skills to the very solid common sense and on-the-job learning they already have at their disposal (see training and development recommendations page 30)

#### Back office support for frontline fisheries staff

Frontline staff can control certain elements of their work - i.e. their own activity and approach to relationship building and engagement. However, it was clear from the interviews that they are also reliant on other MMO staff to support them by answering queries and ensuring that they have detailed knowledge of legislation and that this is essential to ensure they are not left exposed or undermined while doing their jobs. MMO staff suggested this support was not always timely or sufficient.

#### A review of approaches to consultations

All the MMO staff identified deficiencies in MMO's approach to consultations. Key issues are:

- Information flow from MMO centre to frontline staff about consultation timings and details. Staff feel un-consulted and underprepared, which undermines them in front of fishers.
- Consultation design is sometimes un-strategic and unfit for purpose as it does not take the needs, preferences, and pressure points of the target audience into account. This can make consultations time-consuming, frustrating, and distracting for frontline staff.

#### Better continuity and induction between outgoing and incoming staff

One of the issues that fishers and agency staff raised with some consistency was staff turnover and having to start from scratch with new relationships and induction of new staff into fishing methods and context.

#### NE Seeing the value and benefit of frontline engagement

NE staff are very passionate about marine conservation and meeting fishers, in particular being out at sea with them. They speak at length about the importance of conservation and compliance. NE staff also spend much less time engaging directly with local stakeholders and when they do so it is typically in a formal meeting/steering group space. This is an intentional strategy as staff told community organisers that 'NE does not get involved in socio-economics'. NE relies on the IFCA staff to do the local engagement work.

However, in many cases the NE staff interviewed demonstrated an innate 'natural' empathy with fishers, coming from a perception that they share an affinity with the marine environment. This empathy comes from the heart and contrasts with the empathy built up by MMO (and IFCA) staff, which is rooted more in direct experience and observation of fishers' daily struggles and behaviour. There was a sense in which this faith in fishers to do the right thing felt somewhat naive, but also very positive and something to build on.

NE staff interviewed all expressed a desire to engage more closely and directly with fishers as they could see significant benefit in doing so, but because little cultural value is placed on closer and more direct engagement by NE, it's a low priority for staff. Their heavy workload leaves them with very limited time to engage with fishers and so it rarely happens as other tasks are prioritised.

Staff expressed that they would feel out of their comfort zones in a front-line engagement role - they feel they either need significant training in order to do that work or that specialist engagement staff should do that work.

There is evidence from fisher feedback, particularly in Cromer, that they perceive NE in a negative light, in part due to what is perceived as a lack of engagement and with it a lack of insight into the fisher context and the impact of legislation on the Cromer fishing community.

#### Technical language and jargon

In the review of engagement approaches on page 15 table four highlights feedback from fishers that written reports are inaccessible to them, due to the length and complexity of language used. NE staff interviewed also felt that inaccessible information in both reports and general communications was an unnecessary and unhelpful barrier to engagement and buy-in from fishers.

#### Agency staff perceptions of local fishers

This section of the study presents a summary of the perceptions of agency staff to local fishers. Agency staff were asked the question 'What do you think of the fishers?', and their responses are a key part of this section.

All the agency staff interviewed articulated respect for the fishers:

- Bravery and hard work - working in a high risk job, and being pushed to the limit.
- Their skills as businessmen and entrepreneurs can often be overlooked, many fishers are multi-talented and very enterprising - making the most out of a difficult living.
- The ingrained commitment to fishing as a way of life was respected.
- Staff want fisheries to succeed and be viable. Although committed to marine conservation via quotas, regulation and project work, all agency staff recognise the need for a proportionate legislative solution that benefits everyone. There is no lack of advocacy for fishers - some staff, notably the IFCA, wish that they could advocate more for fishers.
- Fishers are seen as vital conservation partners, with much in common with marine conservationists, although there is much frustration that they don't easily embrace this commonality. This was expressed particularly by NE staff.

As is shown in other sections of the study, the relationship between fishers and agency staff can be a combative and is built on a constantly shifting foundation of (mis)trust. Agency staff do not always acknowledge the dangerous nature of the work fishers do in their day-to-day dealings with them. This may indicate that although the agency staff interviewed are mostly able to rationalise behaviour and context, they sometimes use language that does not reflect their overall feelings.

## 6. Key lessons and recommendations

After identifying the key lessons for improved engagement, the report sets out recommendations to develop and implement sustainable engagement and positive grassroots relationships. The recommendations are based on the findings together with the authors' insight and knowledge of community engagement, organising and organisational culture. The recommendations are for MMO and NE.

When taking a community organising approach to engaging fishing communities these are the key lessons:

- Regular, strategic, one-to-one work to build trust and personal connection is the most important activity that both MMO and NE could improve, increase and prioritise. This was the most common response when staff and fishers were asked what would make the most difference to improve relationships.
- Strategic engagement needs to address and analyse the root causes and not simply the symptoms and to be designed as a dialogue that is accessible to the right people
- Self-awareness, interpersonal and listening skills should be a key part of all frontline worker training across all agencies, with an emphasis on self-reflection and self-understanding to support them on the frontline.
- An improved recognition and understanding from agency staff about their power, influence, and position and how this power is perceived by fishers is fundamental. In addition, agency staff should be equipped to respond to local power dynamics in both an organisational and individual context.

### Training

All interviewees on the frontline in all three agencies felt that training would enhance their ability to do their jobs effectively. The training recommendations cover three key aspects of professional development:

**Individual level:** Personal awareness, resilience, and wellbeing

**Local team level:** Strategic and operational engagement competencies

**Organisational level:** Working towards co-management

#### Individual level: Personal awareness, resilience, and wellbeing

MMO and NE frontline staff would benefit from the following training:

- Managing on the front line: self-care, reflection, and resilience
- Identifying personal power
- Developing as a reflective practitioner

#### Local team level: Strategic and operational engagement competencies

The following menu of different options, based on the development needs that staff identified, and the study's findings:

#### MMO

- Boundary-spanning engagement strategies - how to achieve clarity and trust across multiple roles, including improved communication skills around enforcement

- Active listening and powerful questioning
- Conflict management
- Developing effective, inclusive consultations
- Understanding power and participation
- Better fishing industry training and area induction for new staff (this could be done in partnership with local fishers).

NE

- Introduction to relationship building: a community organising approach
- Introduction to engagement tools and techniques
- Conflict management
- Marine conservation: sharing passion, stories and ambitions - NE and fishers. A narrative therapy approach, letting go of old stories and creating lived new narratives
- Understanding power and participation.

#### Organisation-level: Working towards co-management

Agencies meet to co-create a co-management model for fisheries, followed up with workshops bringing fishers, local community and agencies together in a facilitated space to explore future working relationships and models for co-management. Community workshops to explore responses to change, shared values and interests, power and participation and letting go of old stories and creating lived new narratives.

## 7. Concluding remarks

The UK fisheries context is incredibly complex, shaped by long memories and a lengthy history of conflict and change. Understandably government agencies and fishing communities both feel that neither fully understands the other, and this causes frustration and anger on both sides, which often serves to block progress.

The authors wish to say how impressed they are by the fortitude and commitment on both sides - from frontline agency staff navigating such instability and volatility on a daily basis, and from fishers in their commitment to such a phenomenally hard job in the face of frequent setbacks to establishing stable and sustainable livelihoods.

This is an inherited situation and it is incumbent on everyone currently involved to commit to helping to change that for future generations. There are certainly pockets of good practice and positivity on both sides - examples of where trusting relationships are developing, and younger fishers very willing to engage without the historical baggage carried by the older ones.

This study has covered a lot of ground; however, the following messages are the ones which most resonate and should form the foundations of any new approach:

- Three-to-five-year strategic engagement plans to shape operational activity and goals, linked to the overall aim of implementing genuine co-management of fisheries.
- Placing power dynamics at the heart of an engagement strategy
- Far greater value placed on listening and trust-building expertise within local teams, and a far deeper understanding of how to build inclusivity and involvement
- More effective recruitment to and proactive support and training for frontline teams in order for them to achieve the aim of delivering compliance through education and engagement.

## References

Fisher S. et al., (2011). Working with conflict: Skills and Strategies for action (7th Press). Zed Books Ltd. London. p.23

VeneKlasen L. and Miller V. (2007) A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation (2nd Ed). Practical Action Press Warwickshire p.41

## Appendix One: Community organising methodology

Community organising is a highly inclusive form of engagement. The objective is social, economic and environmental justice and this is achieved by people coming together around shared interests and values to build power and take collective action for change. Crucially it is led by those with lived experience and who are impacted by the injustice they face. The key elements of community organising are listening, power and action. For this project we will be taking two of these elements - listening and power in order to meet the project objectives.

*Listening* occurs through both one-to-one and group conversations. The community organising team develop a conversation 'framework' containing key questions and prompts which they move through when speaking with community members to develop dialogue and relationships.

Active listening skills and strategic questioning techniques are used in these conversations. The organiser listens to understand what is happening and makes space for facts, feelings, knowledge and experience to emerge. They use strategic questions to uncover new information, ideas and solutions and to unlock creativity and energy. In this way, the conversation is generative. Having the conversation framework enables the organiser to record key aspects of the conversation in a way that can be analysed and compared with other conversations to build a picture of the community or issue. The advanced communication skills employed by the community organiser will enable trusting relationships to form; folk are rarely given the time and space to be really heard and understood; in our experience local people who speak with community organisers often feel for the first time that their story and their experience is truly valued.

As part of the conversation, the community organiser will explore issues of power and influence as a way for both community member and community organiser to develop a picture of relationships both inside and outside the community that impact on the lives and experiences of that community. In a full community organising project, this would lead to local people analysing power in order to develop strategy and tactics for the actions they take at a later stage. However, for this project, we will ask folks to reflect on power with an emphasis on opportunities and barriers to fully participate in decision-making, processes and initiatives by different agencies within the fishing industry.

In a full community organising process, through the initial conversation or listening campaign, we would identify local leaders, folks who are well connected within their community and begin to bring people together around common generative themes. These would be issues or ideas about which there is clear motivation and energy to move forward to action on them. Folk would be identified for different roles depending on their time and motivation and an organising team would emerge. This team would continue with the one-to-one conversations to build the collective voice which will be key for any strategy for organising social action. Clearly we will not be building towards these steps for this project.

The engagement or listening stage of the community organising methodology is an effective and powerful way for local people to tell their stories and reveal the truth of their lived experience. It is these rich stories and our analysis of them that will enable us to meet the objectives for this project. There are many different interpretations of the process of community organising, one framework that Helen and Dot have been influential in developing can be found here: [Community Organising Framework - Community Organisers \(corganisers.org.uk\)](http://CommunityOrganisingFramework-CommunityOrganisers(corganisers.org.uk))

## Appendix two: Listening script overview

This document shows how we conduct our conversations with local people and agency staff. This is an overview of the more in-depth script that we will use in the one-to-one conversations.

The script design is based on our combined years of experience speaking to people as community organisers on doorsteps, in local areas, parks, and many other locations and more recently conducting phone and Zoom based listening exercises. The questioning style draws on our knowledge of Active Listening, Community Organising practices in the UK, North and South America, Art of Hosting practices and various power analysis techniques.

The objectives that are met in each section are shown. There are multiple questions asked in each section to make sure each topic is explored in full and to check the interviewer's understanding of what is said. Most sections are kept identical for both fishers and agency staff and we have indicated which group each section is aimed at.

### **Introduction**

Interview will:

- Introduce themselves and their purpose (guided by MMO text on the project and what will happen next)
- Be very clear that they are here to listen! Interviewers are independent, new to this area of work so NOT experts in anything but listening to them.
- Will explain the kinds of questions to be asked, the length of the conversation and ensure respondents understand they are in control (can stop, don't have to answer, can ask for clarification)
- Explain anonymity regarding quotes and references
- Seek permission to record the conversation digitally (explaining that this is to ensure their story is heard in their own words, not interviewer's interpretation)
- Assure them that their contribution will be anonymous. Interviewer won't share any information or part of the conversation that could identify them
- GDPR

### **Section 1**

#### **Building a picture: (local area or workplace) Objectives 1 + 2**

Both groups: We begin with questions about people's work and their thoughts on their area to put them at ease and for us to understand who each person is and what they do so that we can frame future questions. We also want to re-establish ourselves as new to this area of work and relatively inexperienced so that they understand that they may need to explain context or jargon to us for example. Also, we reinforce the fact that we are here to listen, not as experts of any kind.

### **Section 2**

#### **Building a picture: people: Objectives 1 + 2**

For Fishers: We will ask about local people more specifically connected with the fisher's work to see who they most have contact with.

For Staff: We will ask more specifically about their work with local people and how they've experienced this.

### **Section 3**

#### **Agencies/organisations background: Objective 1**

For Fishers only: We will narrow the field to asking about who they have contact with from the agencies and what their understanding of their roles and outreach work is. (MMO, NE, IFCA, other)

#### **Section 4**

##### **Positives/Negatives of experiences: Objective 2**

For Fishers only: This section builds on Section 3. asking for more detail on what kinds of outreach activity they have experienced and what they thought about this.

#### **Section 5**

##### **Vision Objectives 1 + 3**

Both groups: Community organisers seek to encourage people to work together towards a shared vision. In this section we use this approach to find out whether the interviewee has ideas of what they would like to see happening next. We will draw on specifics given in Sections 2 + 4.

#### **Section 6**

##### **Reflective exercise Objective 2**

Both groups: This is where we will test perceptions both sides have of each other to better understand their relationship. The responses in this section could be brought to further engagement work and explored fully to help to improve communications.

#### **Section 7**

##### **Power (make sure we ask about negative and positive experiences of power) Objectives 1 + 2**

Both groups: Our introduction reads: "The next few questions are going to ask you about power and influence and how it plays out in the relationships in the fishing industry locally." We will first establish an understanding of what we mean by power in this context and then lead the interviewee on a guided reflection of how power affects them and those around them. For an brief overview of expressions of power see (<https://www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/expressions-of-power/>)

#### **Section 8**

##### **Co-management of fisheries Objective 2**

For staff only: The commissioners request that we ask a questions specifically related to the potential of fisheries co-management.

#### **Section 9**

##### **Close**

If we feel that there might be things we want to clarify or check understanding on, we will say that we may come back to them. We will close by asking whether the person has any other contacts they feel we should speak to. We will thank them for their time.

We will explain what will happen next with this work.



